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**Promoting positive change in at-risk students utilizing and  
adapting the FOCUS model in dropout prevention**

**Casebolt, Hampton Durant, Ed.D.**

**The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1987**

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PROMOTING POSITIVE CHANGE IN AT-RISK STUDENTS  
UTILIZING AND ADAPTING THE FOCUS  
MODEL IN DROPOUT PREVENTION

by

Hampton Durant Casebolt

A Dissertation Submitted to  
the Faculty of the Graduate School at  
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APPROVAL PAGE

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The number of students who are leaving school prior to graduation is alarming; however, educators are bracing for an even greater surge in the rate due to school and curriculum reforms implemented in response to recommendations made in national commission reports. A number of studies and programs have been directed toward preventing dropouts on the senior high school level and have realized varying degrees of success. Although experts agree that early identification is the key to preventing dropouts, little has been done to create dropout prevention programs in the lower grade levels of our schools.

The purpose of this study was to complete a comprehensive analysis of the impact of one junior high school program, FOCUS, on young adolescents who had been identified as high risk students. Preassessment and postassessment measures of the FOCUS class and a comparison group were compared and descriptive profiles of the FOCUS students were also included. The hypotheses addressed in the study were:

- (1) There is a statistically significant increase in the self-concept scores of FOCUS students when compared to students of similar background not participating in the FOCUS program as measured by use of the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale.
- (2) There is a statistically significant increase in the academic achievement profile of FOCUS students when compared to students of similar background not participating in the FOCUS program.

- (3) There is a statistically significant decrease in the number of assignments to the in-school suspension center when compared to students of similar background not participating in the FOCUS program.
- (4) There is a statistically significant decrease in the number of out-of-school suspension assignments when compared to students of similar background not participating in the FOCUS program.
- (5) There is a statistically significant increase in the attendance of students involved in the FOCUS program when compared to students of similar background not participating in the FOCUS program.
- (6) There is a statistically significant increase in the scores of the students involved in the FOCUS program on the California Achievement Test when compared to students of similar background not participating in the FOCUS program.
- (7) There will be a positive increase in the perception of the FOCUS program on the part of the students participating in the program, the parents of these students, and the faculty of the school.

The results of the study showed that the FOCUS group had improved significantly in contrast with the comparison group in attendance, in-school suspension assignments, and grades in language arts, science, social studies, and health/physical education when the level of significance was set at the .05 level. There were no significant differences found in the areas of self-concept improvement, California Achievement Test scores, out-of-school suspensions, and mathematics

grades; however, the mean differences for these areas were in the predicted direction as evidenced by the calculated t test values.

Profiles of each student were developed to verify and extend the findings yielded in the group comparison. The profiles included the race, sex, grade level, courses failed, absences, in-school suspension assignments, out-of-school suspension assignments, socioeconomic data, and awareness of home problems. The student profiles addressed the 7th hypothesis of the study, and the information gathered demonstrated that potential dropouts occur across a wide spectrum of society in all socioeconomic groups and home situations.

Significant differences were found to exist in the areas of attendance, in-school suspension, and in the majority of the academic courses, and the value of the FOCUS program has been clearly demonstrated. Potential dropouts do not find themselves in the high risk category overnight; therefore, overnight success in cumulative areas such as standardized test scores and self-concept is not likely. A more gradual improvement is more likely in these areas. The key to this improvement is keeping the students in school where the positive experiences so necessary and needed may be provided by programs such as FOCUS.

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Hampton D. Casebolt

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The National Commission on Excellence in Education in its 1983 report to President Reagan, A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform, found that the nation is at risk because competitors throughout the world are overtaking our once unchallenged lead in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation. Although the problem has many causes, education is considered to be the primary factor undergirding our "prosperity, security, and civility" (Goldberg & Harvey, 1983). In addition, the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force has called United States' schools "the Nation's most important institution for the shaping of future citizens" (Graham, 1983).

The Commission found that inattention to the schools put the well-being of the Nation at risk. This distinguished group also indicated that mediocrity is the norm in American education and that "a rising tide of mediocrity" threatens to overwhelm the educational foundations of American society. The Commission offers the following insights as evidence for its statements about American education:

1. On 19 international assessments of student achievement, U.S. students never ranked first or second; in fact, when compared only with students from other industrialized nations, U.S. students ranked in last place seven times.

2. Some 23 million American adults are functionally illiterate.
3. About 13% of U.S. teenagers are functionally illiterate.
4. From 1963 to 1980 a virtually unbroken decline took place in average scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test.
5. A dramatic decline took place in the number of students demonstrating superior achievement on the Scholastic Aptitude Test.
6. Between 1975 and 1980, the number of remedial mathematics courses offered in 4-year public colleges increased by 72%.
7. About one fourth of the recent recruits to the Armed Services were able to read at the 9th-grade level, the minimum necessary to follow safety instructions (Goldberg & Harvey, 1983).

In 1986, the U.S. Department of Education responded to the many questions raised in A Nation at Risk by releasing a new study called What Works: Research About Teaching and Learning. This study looked at the methods employed in writing A Nation at Risk and discovered several potentially serious flaws. For example, some of the most important comparisons made in the study were nearly two decades old. In addition, it is perhaps misleading to compare our mass system with European systems of secondary education since, at the higher grade levels, more American students are still in school when compared to their European counterparts. In addition, many foreign countries generally have centralized ministries of education and national curriculum guides concentrating on academic subjects and requiring longer school years (Walberg, 1986).

However, the information contained in What Works: Research About Teaching and Learning is far from comforting. When one looks at the data and figures comparing the countries to each other, one finds that the results obtained from surveys conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement are even more disturbing than those results released in A Nation at Risk. For example, in the 8th grade, in which dropouts are minimal, U.S. students scored third from the bottom among 14 developed countries and provinces (Walberg, 1986).

#### The Dropout: A Most Serious Problem

Specific data on what is perhaps one of the most serious problems alluded to in these reports--the dropout rate--follow. It is probably more appropriate to refer to this problem as the "turn-off syndrome" since many young students are turned off due to years of failing experiences and begin to develop inappropriate behavior patterns for which they are punished and then eventually leave school. In this sense, many students are pushed out of school because of a structure and a set of experiences that do not attend to their needs and cause them to fail.

If educators cannot keep students in school, they cannot help them grow both academically and personally. At the same time, regulations designed to keep students in school, i.e., mandatory attendance laws, are perceived negatively by the potential dropout and serve to reinforce failure and contribute to the major problems faced by professionals working with young adults today--including the use of drugs

and discipline problems. Generally, the typical school experiences for the dropout candidate contribute to the problem instead of providing a solution.

Nationally, one out of every four students who began 9th grade in August of this year will not graduate four years hence. In some urban areas, the dropout rate among minorities exceeds 50% according to a recently completed congressional report (Huntley, 1987). An estimated 800,000 to 1 million teenagers quit school annually (Huntley, 1987). In addition to the growing trend toward dropping out of school, educators are bracing for a greater surge in the rate in the late 1980s due to school reform and the responses of policy makers to the recommendations made in many national commission reports.

A number of studies and programs have been directed toward preventing dropouts on the senior high school level and have realized success; however, little has been done to create dropout prevention programs on the junior high school level. Identifying dropouts on the junior high school level is extremely difficult. Students who have stopped coming to school before the legal school leaving age are considered truants, not dropouts. Adolescents who are incarcerated in a state's correctional system are often considered to be enrolled in school, although the school is part of the penal facility and not part of the public school system and the same standards are not necessarily applied as in public schools. Neglect of the dropout problem typically ranks first among the 10 major criticisms made by the various reform commission reports of the past three years (Johnston, Markle, & Harshbarger, 1985).

The dropout literature gives the impression that the dropout problem occurs in later adolescence after the students have left the junior high schools. This is due, to a large extent, to the mandatory attendance laws of the states. However, much of the dropout literature seems to indicate that the seeds for dropping out are planted early in the student's school career. The pattern of school failure and alienation begins in the elementary grades. Intervention, therefore, is necessary in the middle grades to prevent the cycle which, if not halted, will continue to create dropouts from our nation's schools.

#### Profile of the Potential Dropout

Many of the "at risk" students are not those with identified learning problems. The student most likely to drop out of the school setting is the underachieving student who has average intellectual ability but for complicated and often undiscovered or unknown reasons is unsuccessful in his/her studies. The potential dropout generally has a poor self-concept and lacks basic study skills so important to success in school. The potential dropout has fewer opportunities than classmates for learning outside of school, and these students are unpopular with other students and feel alienated from school life. These students generally do not take part in the extracurricular life of a school and often feel that a job is more important to them than school.

A set of factors which seem to exert an influence on a potential dropout is found in the student's family background. The absence of strong family traditions, linked with a family reward structure which

may not encourage school achievement, seems to work against a student remaining in school. Students from single parent families are more likely to drop out of school than students from two parent families. Even among economically sound families, the changing pattern of the American family may contribute toward a student dropping out of school.

Educators often unwittingly contribute to the dropout problem by creating a system that is inflexible and does not respond to the needs of special students, i.e., the potential dropout. Dropouts generally cite school-related factors as the major reason for leaving school. While poor grades are one factor, discipline problems often resulting in suspension or expulsion are another major reason for students leaving school without a diploma. Students also cite the high school experience as different from the elementary school experience as another reason for leaving school. The "new" curriculum along with its increased requirements also has a major impact upon the potential dropout.

In summary, the dropout lacks self-esteem and feelings of personal efficacy, has a low need for self-development, and a lack of commitment to social values. Feelings of inferiority are present and the conditions which precede the decision to drop out of school persist for many years. The student who feels inferior about himself lacks a strong ego structure and is often afraid to try to learn. When a student believes that he does not have the ability to learn, he will often no longer try in school. The decision to leave school is made when students can no longer cope with the school environment which alienated them.



### Treatment of the Problem

Any project that attempts to deal with the dropout problem should address several objectives. First, programs should ensure that all capable students develop some minimum number of useful basic skills. Second, they should attract and hold students by introducing components that meet student's economic needs. Further, these programs should have clear plans of action and serve small groups of students. The teachers in such programs should expect their students to succeed, the students should support the program goals, and the curriculum should focus on real-life problems and situations. All programs that address the dropout issue and help keep students in school should have what has been called by one author as the "four C's": cash, care, computers, and coalitions.

The literature provides a great deal of information relating to the descriptors of potential dropouts and successful dropout prevention programs; however, actual descriptions of programs that are currently in operation appear to be lacking. Project Mack, an experimental dropout prevention program developed in Oakland, California, has managed to reduce the dropout and absentee rate dramatically. A project in Edmonds School District, Lynnwood, Washington, is designed to isolate factors which might result in early identification of potential dropouts. The Board of Education of Los Angeles, California has developed methods whereby potential dropouts may be identified and developed a pilot program that deals directly with the prevention of dropouts.

One of the most effective efforts in dealing with potential dropouts is the FOCUS project. The FOCUS project is a nationally validated program sponsored by the National Diffusion Network and was originally developed by Human Resources Associates, Inc. of Hastings, Minnesota. FOCUS has been implemented in at least one other school setting in North Carolina, Clayton High School in Johnston County, and has produced extremely effective results. Because of the practical, adaptive nature of the FOCUS concept, it can be adopted in a school setting with a minimum of disruption to the remaining structure of the school organization.

The concept of FOCUS is to establish a "school within a school" for students who cannot or will not cope with the typical school setting. The FOCUS program seeks to:

1. reduce student disaffection with school and learning;
2. improve each student's ability in basic skills;
3. build a classroom that demonstrates caring principles;
4. improve each student's ability to relate effectively with peers and adults; and
5. give each student reason to be optimistic about the future.

Because the FOCUS program has been so effective in addressing the dropout problem at the high school level, it has been suggested that even more successful outcomes would be yielded if it were implemented at the middle grades level. Several schools across the country have adapted FOCUS to a middle school/junior high setting, and an examination of the impact of these efforts is essential to this study.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to present a comprehensive analysis of the impact of the FOCUS program on students who have been identified as high risk. The study was conducted in a selected school setting to determine the program's effectiveness in reducing or eliminating the factors associated with students dropping out of school as well as to profile the participants. For the first part of the study an experimental group of high-risk students involved in the FOCUS program were compared to a similar group of students in the same school but not involved in the program. The following hypotheses were addressed in this portion of the study:

- H<sub>1</sub>: There is a statistically significant increase in the self-concept scores of FOCUS students when compared to students of similar background not participating in the FOCUS program as measured by use of the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale.
- H<sub>2</sub>: There is a statistically significant increase in the academic achievement profile of FOCUS students when compared to students of similar background not participating in the FOCUS program.
- H<sub>3</sub>: There is a statistically significant decrease in the number of assignments to the in-school suspension center when compared to students of similar background not participating in the FOCUS program.

- H<sub>4</sub>: There is a statistically significant decrease in the number of out-of-school suspension assignments when compared to students of similar background not participating in the FOCUS program.
- H<sub>5</sub>: There is a statistically significant increase in the attendance of students involved in the FOCUS program when compared to students of similar background not participating in the FOCUS program.
- H<sub>6</sub>: There is a statistically significant increase in the scores of the students involved in the FOCUS program on the California Achievement Test when compared to students of similar background not participating in the FOCUS program.
- H<sub>7</sub>: There is a positive increase in the perception of the FOCUS program on the part of the students participating in the program, the parents of these students, and the faculty of the school.

The data collected for testing these hypotheses were collected from the end of the 1985-1986 school year through the end of the 1986-1987 school year. The data were collected as follows:

1. Positive self-concept and communication skills development for both the FOCUS group and the comparison group were measured by pre- and posttests utilizing the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale.
2. California Achievement Test score results were used from the previous school year (1985-1986) to the current school year (1986-1987) to measure achievement.

3. Student attendance was reviewed and student attendance during participation in FOCUS was compared with student attendance prior to entrance into the program. In addition, the comparison group's attendance patterns were analyzed and compared to the FOCUS group's attendance.
4. Student grades were reviewed and grades made during participation in FOCUS were compared with student grades prior to entrance into the program. Also, the comparison group's grades were analyzed and compared to the FOCUS group's.
5. Discipline records (both in-school suspension assignments and out-of-school suspensions) were reviewed and a comparison made with these figures prior to entrance into the program. Careful records of the comparison group's discipline records were kept and compared to the FOCUS group.

For the second part of the study personal interviews of members of the FOCUS group were conducted by the guidance counselors at East Junior High School. When appropriate, comments made by the students as well as brief descriptions of the FOCUS students will be included in this study to provide a glimpse into the world of the potential dropout. To further provide insights into the difficulties of dealing with potential dropouts in a school setting, brief interviews were conducted with faculty members and appropriate comments included in this paper. Parent and community reaction to the FOCUS program is also included.

### Description of the Setting

Alexander County is primarily a rural community with the majority of citizens employed in agriculture, furniture, and textiles. As such, the vast majority of the county work force is engaged in blue-collar types of employment. However, a transition seems to be occurring. In its geographical region, Alexander County is second only to Catawba County (Hickory area) in experiencing population growth in recent years. New businesses have located in the area and have expressed concern for better educated employees. Business leaders have discussed the correlation between the employees' educational level, their dependability, and potential to do quality work. The Alexander County School System, located in Region 7 of North Carolina, is comprised of 10 schools with a total enrollment of approximately 5,000 students. Since 1981 the school system's dropout rate has averaged 6.6%, slightly below the North Carolina estimated average of 6.9%. This figure represents approximately 90-100 students who actually leave the school system each year before graduating. Although great care is being taken to compile accurate statistics, this figure in all probability does not represent some students who drop out during the summer months, or those who reach age 16 and drop out prior to entering high school.

During the past four years a number of significant trends have occurred which have prompted concern and alarm on the part of school, police, and social service officials. The incidence of sexual abuse and child abuse cases has skyrocketed to epidemic proportions. For

example, a total of 18 cases of child abuse have been documented by the Department of Social Services in Alexander County during the last year alone. This is the number of cases documented, not the number of cases under investigation. In a recent case, two juvenile males were involved in a sexual abuse case involving extremely serious consequences.

In cooperative discussions among the sheriff's department, the social service agency, and school officials, it has become quite clear that students dropping out of school have become major sources of trouble for legal and social agencies. Students who are quitting school seem to be much more likely to be involved in crimes. All three agencies have agreed that something must be done to solve the problem.

In relation to the issue of students dropping out of school, the junior high school years appear to be the most difficult times for students. As a result of the employment of a county-wide coordinator for drop-out prevention, Alexander County Schools have been able to document a number of significant trends:

1. Eighty-five percent of students who decide to quit school have made that decision in the junior high school years (grades 7-9).
2. Seventy-seven percent of all students deciding to quit school indicated the junior high grades were the most difficult years in school, both academically and socially.
3. The incidence of students dropping out of school in the junior high years is climbing steadily. Of the 300 students

who have quit school in Alexander County over the past three years, approximately one-third were in junior high school.

Although the statistics are alarming, they become more of a concern when one considers that many junior high school students are still under the compulsory attendance requirements of the State of North Carolina and, therefore, cannot drop out of school.

#### Significance of the Study

FOCUS has worked well with a small group of eighth graders for one year (1985-1986). Hopefully, this study will document continued success with FOCUS for the second year. In addition, it has been discovered that 9th-grade students who returned to mainstream classes from FOCUS this school year without the support of the FOCUS program have experienced some difficulties, resulting in increased referrals for disciplinary problems and absenteeism. This represents a return to pre-FOCUS behavior problems and is a major concern of the personnel of East Junior High School.

Results obtained from this study will lead to a revision of the program to include 9th-grade students at the junior high school level and expansion of the program to the 10th grade at the senior high school. Sustained involvement in the FOCUS project through the initial year at the senior high school level will provide a needed link to reduce the risk of students dropping out, and give some high-risk students an opportunity to remain in school long enough to be eligible for vocational and/or work-release classes and programs.



### Limitations

The writer of this dissertation is familiar only with the development and operation of FOCUS at East Junior High School in rural Alexander County, North Carolina. The findings of the study are not generalizable to the high school level and have limited generalizability to middle level schools in a similar setting with similar student backgrounds.

### Delimitations

Although the causes of young people dropping out of school are numerous and extremely difficult to identify, earlier discussions have concentrated on many causes: personal, family, school, and socioeconomic factors to name a few. This paper concentrates only on the school factors present in the potential dropout and does not look at the other factors involved in dropping out except in a cursory manner designed to add depth to the reader's knowledge of the dropout problem.

Chapter I has provided an overview of the problems facing American education with special emphasis on the dynamics related to the student dropout area. A specific program designed to curb the dropout rate was outlined. An overview of the study of this program in a specific setting was provided. Chapter II will include an extensive review of the literature related to this problem area.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Overview

Between the turn of the century and the middle 1960s the United States succeeded in reversing its school drop-out rate. Early in the 1900s the percentage of students who left school without a diploma was almost 75%; by the 1960s only 25% of students dropped out. This decrease in all probability represents a reflection of the move from a rural economy to an urban economy (Johnston, Markle, & Harshbarger, 1985). However, the number of dropouts is on the rise once again; coupled with this rise is a high level of concern for the dropout problem. Nearly one third of the respondents in a 1979 national survey of school administrators cited early dropouts as a problem in their districts; over half of the administrators in districts with more than 25,000 students reported that early dropouts are a problem (Natriello, McDill, & Pallas, 1985).

While reliable statistics on school attendance are difficult to obtain, it is estimated that approximately 25% of all 18-year-olds have not graduated from high school. Most students who drop out do so after they have entered the 9th grade (Natriello et al., 1985). In a 1982 study, the U.S. Bureau of the Census reported that the percentage of 18- and 19-year-olds who were not enrolled in school and did not have high school diplomas was 17.9% for white males and

13.2% for white females. Among black students, 18.9% of the males and 19.7% of the females did not possess a high school diploma. Among Hispanics, the numbers rose dramatically with 44.2% of the males and 29.3% of the females not possessing a high school diploma (Johnston et al., 1985).

These high drop-out rates generate public alarm and concern relative to the cost of welfare benefits paid to these dropouts. Nationally, dropouts are going to earn \$237 billion less during their lifetimes than will high school graduates and, among other consequences, state and local governments will collect \$71 billion less in taxes (Mann, 1986). Figures similar to these led the New York State Senate to conclude that at least part of New York City's economic decline in the 1970s was attributable to the city's high drop-out rate of nearly 50% (Johnston et al., 1985).

National leaders call the drop-out situation a tragedy that the United States cannot afford; however, definitive action to deal with the problem has been characterized by prose and inertia. Secretary of Education William Bennett proposed that schools be paid a bounty for rescuing dropouts, and Representative Charles Hayes of Illinois proposed a bill that would have authorized \$50 million to fund programs to deal with the drop-out problem; however, the Senate failed to act on it. In addition, many educators are concerned that higher standards in the public schools will cause students who already perform poorly to drop out (Strother, 1986). Thirty-five states have made graduation requirements more stringent during the past two years and 29 states

states have funded programs for the gifted and talented. No state has passed a program to support the students who are now more sharply at risk from the new standards (Mann, 1986).

Alexander and Pallas (1984), in an analysis of data from the Educational Testing Service's Study of Academic Prediction and Growth, indicate that, although the overall advantages of increasing core requirements in the "new basics" are clear, these core requirements, i.e., four years of English; three years each of mathematics, science, and social studies; and one-half year of computer science, seem to have little effect on the performance of students with relatively low grade point averages. Since the core curriculum is mainly composed of academic courses which tap ability along a narrow range of higher academic abilities, Natriello et al. (1985) feel that this approach may also have negative consequences for the low achieving student. Students with limited ability may face a great deal of difficulty in dealing with the new core curriculum and may face repeated failure with little opportunity to engage in other school activities that might afford them some sense of success. The end result of this process is that these students, following repeated failures, will tend to drop out of school.

#### Profile of Potential Student Dropouts

It is important to understand that many of the "at risk" students are not those with learning problems since many programs are designed to meet the needs of special students, i.e., learning disabled programs or educably mentally handicapped programs. The student who is most likely to drop out of the school setting is the underachieving student

who does not have the support system of special programs. These students have average intellectual ability but are continually unsuccessful in their studies. They do not perform poorly enough to qualify for special education services, yet they are not sufficiently motivated to be successful in most regular programs. They generally have a poor self-concept, lack basic study skills, and their elementary school records indicate a history of social promotion and/or motivational problems (Fitzpatrick, 1984).

Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, and Rock (1986) utilized a longitudinal study of U.S. high school students sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics and developed a "portrait" of the potential school dropout. A disproportionate number of dropouts were male, older than average for their grade level, and members of racial or ethnic minorities. They were likely to attend urban public schools in the South or West. They came from low-income, often single parent families; many had mothers who worked outside the home, who lacked formal education, and who had low educational expectations for their children. These young people had few study resources available to them at home, and their parents were not interested in monitoring their school or nonschool activities.

The potential dropouts had fewer opportunities than their classmates for learning outside of school; their grades and test scores were lower; they read less, did less homework, and experienced more disciplinary problems in school. These students were also unpopular with other students and felt alienated from school life. The potential

dropout did not take part in extracurricular activities and students who worked felt that their jobs were more important to them than school (Ekstrom et al., 1986).

The "at risk" students also become adept at surviving in school while contributing little to the activities in the classroom. A direct result of this problem is that these students develop marginal skills, often become discipline problems, and fall behind the intellectual development of their classmates. Frustration and alienation increase to a point where the student drops out of school. Fitzpatrick (1984) outlined the steps in the drop-out process:

1. The student loses interest in school work with the consequence of lowered grades.
2. The student begins to skip classes and begins to come into contact with school authorities.
3. The student exhibits disruptive behavior for which he is forced to leave class or is suspended from school.
4. The student's parents become involved and the student's defensiveness and negativism increase.
5. The student decides to leave the school setting.

One of the major dilemmas facing educators today is how to deal with the volume of young people leaving school. Educators are quick to point out that the frustration of drop-out prevention does not stem from the larger-than-life problems, but the personal problems faced by young people. Teenagers list countless reasons for dropping out, from pregnancy to conflicts in the classroom. The variety of causes makes

targeting programs difficult, since educators must devise system-wide solutions for individual problems. A number of personal factors have been isolated by Johnston et al. (1985) which appear to complement familial, economic, and school-related causes for dropping out. They point out a high correlation between dropping out and absenteeism resulting from illness, a fact confirming results from an earlier study by Hathaway and Rhodes (1979). Dropouts manifest poor personal-social adjustment and are inclined toward aggressive behavior, impulsiveness and early drinking. These students have poorly defined goals and lack self-esteem especially when related to school performance. Hinkley (1979) found that the dropout must have immediate, concrete rewards and must be able to see the use or proposed use of any learning sequence before he will even try to learn.

Summarizing many of the studies of the personality of the dropout, Gadwa and Griggs (1985) have characterized the dropout as lacking self-esteem and feelings of personal efficacy, having a low need for self-development, and a lack of commitment to social values. Feelings of inferiority are present in the potential dropout and, while the decision to drop out may occur spontaneously, the conditions which precede the decision often persist for many years. The student who feels inferior about himself lacks a strong ego structure and is often afraid to try to learn. When a student believes that he does not have the ability that others have, he will often no longer try in school. The decision to leave school is made when students can no longer cope with the school environment which alienated them (Hinkley, 1979).

### Family Variables as a Contributor to the Dropout Problem

A set of factors which seem to exert a profound influence on the decision to leave school is found in the student's family background. The United States Office of Education (1978) found that there is a strong relationship between the level of education attained by the student's parents and likelihood that the student will drop out of school. The absence of a strong family tradition of education, linked with a family reward structure which may not encourage school achievement, seems to work against a student remaining in school through graduation. Students from single parent families are twice as likely to drop out of school as students from two parent families. It has also been discovered that children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to drop out than students from sound economic circumstances (Johnston et al., 1985).

Although families were against the potential dropouts leaving school, they had been unable to stop it from happening and the decision was eventually left up to the dropout. Other members of the dropout's family may have dropped out of school, and the home environment may be characterized by such problems as divorce, separation, death, and sibling difficulties. The families had also never had any form of counseling for these difficulties (Mahan & Johnson, 1983). Other family-related factors include poor communications between home and school as well as spouse and/or child abuse. The dropout's family priorities seem to be focused upon crises which have a much higher



survival priority than does school attainment (Johnston et al., 1985).

Even among economically sound families, the changing pattern of the American family may contribute to decreased school achievement and a resulting inclination toward truancy and dropping out. In second marriages which bring a new parent into the home, it is often found that the newcomer to the relationship is unwilling to place too much pressure on students to achieve. He may be unwilling to insist that his new son or daughter do homework for fear of jeopardizing the new and fragile relationship in the home and in this reluctance lies the seeds of declining achievement and school failure (Johnston et al., 1985).

As a result of the fragile home situation and lack of support from the home, the potential dropout is usually emotionally dependent upon others. Since the potential dropouts do not have the maternal and/or paternal relationships, they seem to be more dependent upon personal relationships with others. They lack security and often find it difficult to learn because they are afraid to ask for help. They are defeated before they ever try and school problems are created when these students act out to compensate for their lack of confidence or ability to successfully complete a particular learning activity (Hinkley, 1979).

Many parents in impoverished home settings are forced through the desperateness of their day-to-day situations to become strictly present-oriented. Thus, meeting primary needs for food, clothing and

shelter take precedence over supervision of homework and school-related matters. Wagner (1984) indicates that these same parents were not successful in school, distrust all institutions including the school, and cannot see education as offering upward mobility. Their perceptions seem to exclude the numerous success stories of people who have worked themselves up the ladder of success through a better education.

Another family dimension, teenage pregnancy, may contribute heavily to dropping out. More than 20% of white female dropouts and 25% of minority female dropouts gave pregnancy as a reason for dropping out of school (Johnston et al, 1985). The obstacles faced by teenage mothers are enormous and keeping up with school becomes very difficult. Dropping out appears to be a reasonable alternative to these difficulties. The American Association of School Administrators has reported that 80% of mothers less than 17 years old will never complete high school (Gadwa & Griggs, 1985). Marriage, not necessarily connected with pregnancy, also contributes to dropping out. Over 33% of white female dropouts and 20% of minority dropouts cited marriage as the reason for leaving school (Johnston et al., 1985).

A number of studies (D'Amico, 1984; Michael & Tuma, 1983; Pallas, 1984) indicate that economic problems play a role in students' decisions to drop out of school. Twenty-five percent of the white male students who dropped out of school indicated they left school because they were offered a job and chose to take it. Ten percent of white and

minority females also stated this reason for dropping out. Twenty percent of minority males and 10% of white males left school because of the need to support a family. Approximately 10% of minority and white females gave the same explanation as their reason for quitting school. Johnston et al. (1985) found that holding a job is a very strong predictor of a student's tendency to drop out of school for both males and females.

#### The Structure of the School as a Contributor to Dropping Out

Dropouts usually signal their intentions by being truant from school for extended periods of time. The reasons most often given for truancy are dislike or/and boredom with school, social adjustment problems, and academic difficulties. One must consider the social environment of the schools as a contributing factor to truancy. One study has found that teacher and student perceptions of the social climate of the classroom correlate with the number of absences. Classes that are more rule-oriented than person-oriented are more likely to have a higher absentee rate (Johnston et al., 1985). Gadwa and Griggs (1985) found that parents and teachers contribute toward truancy by overindulging or overprotecting students, thereby preventing them from experiencing the consequences of their behavior.

School-related factors are the most frequently reported reasons for students leaving school. Students who leave school do so because they are in large part unsuccessful in the school setting. Poor school adjustment, in addition to the lack of academic success, also

contributes to the dropout problem. In addition to poor grades, male dropouts were generally more likely to tell researchers that they were unable to get along with teachers or that they had experienced discipline problems resulting in their suspension or expulsion from school. These discipline problems usually consisted of in-school delinquency, generally directed at authority figures or the school itself (Johnston et al., 1985).

Mahan and Johnson (1983) found that the dropout felt that the high school experience was different from the grade school experience in that grade school was more structured, more student-oriented, and less threatening. The students felt that having one teacher and one classroom was easier to deal with and less confusing to them. The demands of high school, with many teachers and increased movement, seemed overwhelming to many students. The potential dropout usually exhibits a history of transferring schools or changing school systems and, as a result, does not have a strong feeling of affiliation to the high school.

Potential dropouts do not talk with school personnel about any plans to drop out of school because they do not believe it will help and they often do not know who in the school to contact. It has also been found that many dropouts made plans to drop out of school on the "spur of the moment" and often dropped out within a week of deciding to do so. Dropouts indicated they lost interest in school and believed that school personnel had also lost interest in them. Further, they had no idea what alternatives were available to them. The dropout was

usually far behind in classwork and felt that a job was more relevant to him. The potential dropout was not usually involved in school work programs such as Industrial Cooperative Training or Distributive Education (Mahan & Johnson, 1983).

The curriculum offered by the schools has also been found to have an effect upon the potential dropout (Wagner, 1984). The enthusiasm with which students enter the early grades often disappears when they reach the later elementary grades, junior high, and high school grades. Motivation is lacking and teachers often have lower expectations for students from poor families than for students from higher income homes. Many of the curricular materials in use in schools today operate under the assumption that students have traveled, speak standard English well and are college bound.

A student with a poor school history may differ from his/her classmates not only in academic skills but also in the expectation of future success. Stevens (1980) compared "at risk" for school failure students with "normal" classmates on measures of cognitive, academic, and affective competence as well as on a measure of performance under test-like conditions. The "at risk" group was found to be significantly less able, more anxious, less confident and to have fewer coping strategies than those in the control group. Approximately 30% of both "at risk" and "normal" groups showed depressed performance when they thought they were taking a test.

### Overview of the Dropout Problem at the Middle Grades Level

Research related to the high school dropout is extensive; however, there is a scarcity of studies about the junior high school dropout. This may be attributed to a smaller number of junior high school students in the dropout pool due to compulsory attendance requirements. Demographic information seems to indicate a growing problem with this age group. A study prepared for the Citizens' Council for Ohio Schools on 7th- and 8th-grade dropouts (Kaeser & Hooper, 1983) found that reasons for leaving school were due to expulsion, pregnancy, reaching the 16th birthday, marriage, running away from home, and institutionalization.

Youth who are pregnant, age 16 or older, those who run away, and those who are institutionalized constitute the four categories that account for a substantial share of dropouts on the junior high school level. Combined they account for about 30% of the dropouts at the 8th-grade level and 13% at the 7th-grade level. The largest percentage of students withdrawn from the seventh grade was due to expulsions and pregnancies. The data suggests entirely different reasons for leaving junior high school than for leaving high school (Kaeser & Hooper, 1983).

An in-depth analysis of studies regarding causes for dropping out of school reveals a complexity of problems and factors which may be unrelated to each other; in short, there are no simple explanations. The range of circumstances culminating a quitting school appears to be quite varied. Mann (1986) indicates that most students quit school

because of the compounded impact of being poor, growing up in a broken home, retention due to a lack of academic progress, and repeated discipline difficulties with school authorities. The data serves to reinforce the fragility of school completion, the competing forces that press young people away from school, and the different impact of those forces on different kinds of youth (Mann, 1986).

Mahan and Johnson (1983) indicate that high school dropouts tend to be adolescents with extreme family or personal problems who expressed these problems and difficulties in the school setting. These students often did not understand how to seek or were unable to seek support and alternatives. Most of these dropouts had given up on the school system and believed that it had given up on them. Although they did not appear to have the overt problems and difficulties, students from many different strata and backgrounds were for many reasons unable to complete school.

Strother's (1986) review of dropout prevention programs pointed out a number of salient objectives of successful programs. First, they should insure that all capable students develop some minimum number of useful basic skills. Second, they should attract and hold students by including components that meet students' economic needs (e.g., work-study programs) and by providing activities that students find valuable and engaging. Further, these programs should have clear plans of action and serve small groups of students. The teachers in such programs should expect their students to succeed, the students should support the program goals, the curriculum should focus on real-life

problems and situations, and the programs should provide students with successful work experiences in the community.

### Dropout Programs

The literature provides a great deal of information relating to the descriptors of potential dropouts; however, descriptions of programs that are designed to keep students in school and increase such dropout predictors as self-confidence appear to be lacking. It may be concluded that local education agencies are trying many things that deserve serious inquiry; however, a framework that would capture differences among programs that may be related to differences in outcomes seems to be lacking. Mann (1986) concludes that the only thing that is clear is that most school districts are doing many things to prevent students from dropping out.

Any number of factors can be related to the dropout problem, yet educators cannot agree on what constitutes a dropout. Phi Delta Kappa's Center for Evaluation, Development, and Research attempted to develop a consensus definition of what a dropout is by looking at school district reporting practices. After researching many reports, the Center concluded that there is little agreement about what a dropout is. For example, in some school districts death, marriage, taking a job, entering the armed forces, entering college early, being expelled or jailed, going to a school for the deaf, a business school, or a vocational school cause one to be considered a dropout. The Center further concluded that there are at least as many different definitions of a dropout as there are school districts recording dropouts (Mann, 1986).



One study (Neill, 1979) has concluded that the relationship between school influences, especially curriculum, and attendance is poorly researched and that the amount of hard research data on the effectiveness of alternative schools is limited because the phenomenon of alternative programs is barely more than a decade old. For example, in 1982 the National Diffusion Network included only 10 alternative programs and reported little hard data about the effectiveness of these programs (Griffin, Hoffman, & Hunter, 1984).

Despite a lack of adequate evaluative studies there appear to be programs which have been successful in combating the dropout problem and keeping students in school. Most school districts throughout the United States have focused on dropouts at one time or another and have devised interventions for responding to the problem. A survey of secondary school administrators in Illinois (Gadwa & Griggs, 1985) found that provisions for counselor services, including a developmental guidance program for pupils in kindergarten through twelfth grade, ranked second in importance to the administrators in the area of dropout prevention. Further, establishment of clinical counseling services and counselor involvement in work-study programs and job placement ranked 7th and 10th, respectively (Gadwa & Griggs, 1985). California school systems have also found that career counseling and work-study programs have been successful in decreasing the dropout rate (Johnston, Markle, & Harshbarger, 1985).

Project MACK. An experimental dropout prevention program, Project MACK (More Advanced Careers and Knowledge), has been developed

in Oakland, California. During the four-year project, dropouts decreased from 16.1% to 6.2% and the absentee rate was reduced by 14.1%. Career education was infused into the curriculum with the help of counselors, and the students' perception of the relevance of various subject-matter content areas was enhanced. Gadwa and Griggs (1985) report that studies have also focused on the effectiveness of alternative classes that use minimal structure, flexibility, and individualized teaching and counseling to improve self-image and academic achievement and to develop positive attitudes among potential dropouts.

Excelsior, Minnesota. High-risk students in Excelsior, Minnesota have been a part of the implementation of a goal attainment scaling strategy to help these students set realistic expectations, monitor their progress, and achieve positive recognition for improvement. Another study (Anderson & Limoncelli, 1982) has looked at and outlined the counselor's role in identifying and providing for students who have a high probability of failing academically. A project undertaken in the Edmonds School District, Lynnwood, Washington, was designed to isolate factors that might result in early identification of potential dropouts (Gadwa & Griggs, 1985).

Los Angeles, California. A special task force on dropouts reported to the Board of Education of Los Angeles in February 1985. The task force recommended that a practical definition of the word dropout be adopted and that short- and long-range programs, practices, and organizational and instructional changes aimed at reducing the district's dropout rate and enticing dropouts to return to school be

implemented. In the months since the task force report, the Los Angeles Unified School District has established a computer file of potential dropouts. In addition, the district targeted 24 senior high schools with the highest dropout rate to take part in a pilot program focused on dropout prevention (Strother, 1986).

Louisiana. Although programs designed to affect the high-risk student on the junior high school level are scarce; one program established and funded by the Louisiana legislature in 1981 produced mixed results. The purpose of the program was to provide an alternative educational setting for junior high school or older students who were "at risk" of leaving school without graduating. The structure of the local projects included a class size of no more than 15 students for each teacher and a mixture of basic skills and vocational training. Students were referred for participation by their regular classroom teachers and principals on the basis of school failure, absenteeism and disciplinary problems, and the judgment that the students would not remain in school without some intervention. It was found that younger students are more likely to return to the regular classroom than the older students. The program evaluation found that the regular classroom teachers reported that the majority of these returning students were performing as well as, or better than, other students (Griffin, Hoffman, & Hunter, 1984).

New York City. Helene Hodges of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development reports on her experiences as a principal of an alternative school in New York City designed for the most

incorrigible students of Junior High School 22. The school, called Madison Prep, soon began to show students who were considered to be unteachable that they could learn. Hodges found that students in this school could not learn from the analytical, lecture-and-recitation type of teaching found in most classrooms. Learning style tests showed 43% of students enrolled in the school with fair to poor auditory capability and 53% with fair to poor visual, but 88% with strong tactual and 99% with strong kinesthetic. Hodges also found that these students needed global, tactual-kinesthetic experiences, i.e., high interest activities that seem real, require movement, and involve working with others.

FOCUS. The FOCUS program, developed in the Roseville Area School, Roseville, Minnesota over a period of three years extending from 1971-1974, has been identified as an exemplary program by the Joint Dissemination Review Panel of the former Education Division of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. The FOCUS Model uses a mini-school approach that operates in cooperation with and as an extension of existing programs and services provided by the school district. The original concept of FOCUS included classes in English, social studies, math, science, family group and a career exploration class in place of work experience for junior high school programs.

The FOCUS program deals with a specifically selected portion of the student body. The main reason students are accepted into the FOCUS program is because they are performing well below their capacity socially and/or academically. The major difference of FOCUS and other

mini-school concepts dealing with alienated students is the family group. The staff emphasizes care, nurturance, and structure in their approach to students. Students are confronted with their unacceptable behavior and positively reinforced for acting in socially acceptable ways. During the period from 1975 to 1982, the FOCUS Dissemination Project trained 942 teachers, counselors and administrators in 190 schools in 34 states to work with 7,392 disaffected students.

FOCUS has been implemented on the junior high school level as well as the senior high school level. One particular school system, Anoka-Hennepin School District in Anoka, Minnesota, has utilized the FOCUS program in its junior high schools. The primary goal of the project is expressed as follows in their FOCUS manual:

The Junior FOCUS Replication Project is designed to provide a learning environment in which the disaffected student will develop a more positive self-concept and attitude toward school resulting in high attitude test scores, improved grades, and attendance, and a reduction in antisocial incidents.

To accomplish the primary goal of the program, three full-time teachers and three full-time instructional aides were employed at each school where the program operated. FOCUS teachers received special training in group dynamics, behavior modification, and crisis intervention. The teachers, as well as the aides, could best be described as student advocates. Each school utilized a separate area set aside to accommodate 60 students and offered the standard five courses mentioned in the general review of FOCUS earlier. In addition to these courses, each student elected to take one or two mainstream courses of his choice.

### Characteristics of Effective Programs

Regardless of the program design and operation, effective drop-out prevention programs address four major factors through policy, program development, and fiscal enhancement. Those factors are:

1. alienation from teachers, administrators, and peers;
2. poor attendance and high truancy rates;
3. low academic achievement, especially in reading; and
4. negative economic and social pressures at home or in school.

Strother (1986) emphasizes that serving vulnerable and marginal students effectively will require a financial commitment from Congress, state legislatures, the business community, and other institutions in both the public and private sectors.

Programs that seem to address the dropout issue and help keep students in school also have what has been called the "four C's": cash, care, computers, and coalitions. Mann (1986) states that it is not enough to put an "at risk" student into a work experience program or in an on-the-job training situation and indicates there must be a link between learning and earning. Mann also points out that there is no substitute for teachers who know all young people by name and ask about their lives, especially when the classes composed of the "at risk" students are seldom the most sought-after teaching assignments.

The dedication of the teacher is central to planning, individualized or self-paced instruction, and flexibility. It is the social support from warm, nurturant, and accepting teachers that facilitates the activities of an alternative program. Students learn

more from people they like and have better attendance when they perceive their teachers as being empathic, fair, and respectful (Griffin, Hoffman, & Hunter, 1984).

Voices from the Classroom by Olsen and Moore (1982), although not a study of dropouts per se, gives a great deal of insight about interactions among teachers and students in the classroom. The specific findings of the study include:

1. The larger the school, the more problems that students and teachers reported with the quality of teaching. Large classes and overcrowded schools increased every teacher's workload and made it difficult for them to respond to individual needs.
2. Students said that their prime concerns were teachers' knowledge of subject matter and their accessibility.
3. Students indicated that good teachers were characterized by assessability and willingness to provide extra help.
4. Students reported that the better teachers went out of their way to follow up on students who had fallen behind, to reach out to those who seemed to be having trouble, and to give all students opportunities to ask questions and receive help in class.
5. Teachers who embarrassed students were disliked, and some students said that they would do anything to avoid the classes of such teachers. Students also expressed anger and hurt over teachers who showed favoritism to certain students.

The use of computers, the third "C," is two-fold--instructional management and student management. There are many programs designed for use with students and computers available to educators which will enable students to increase their knowledge at their own pace. In addition, the computer is useful in identifying young people as they become increasingly "at risk" and then getting them help. Many students cannot bear the cumulative weight of what is happening to them and their world, and the computer can keep track of these impacts and alert a professional before they reach a danger point (Mann, 1986).

The fourth "C" is the coalition between businesses and schools that should be developed to place much needed monies into dropout prevention programs as well as reserving job vacancies for high school graduates if the school systems could increase the achievement and preparation of such "high risk" student (Mann, 1986).

Better communication of the school objectives to parents of low-income families is a needed part of any dropout prevention program. Wagner (1984) concluded that increased home-school communications helps to improve home attitudes toward school and the learning process. Communication by faculties and administrators with parent groups to keep expenses down for extras while students attend school also appears to be a necessary part of dropout programs. Wagner (1984) also suggested that the school district should assess the total programs offered by the schools and assume full school district responsibility for all activities judged to be desirable and necessary for effective education.



Effective dropout programs should also examine the middle and secondary school curriculum by disciplines. Wagner (1984) stated that the concepts within each course should be examined as to the reality and effect on "at risk" students. Courses should be modified so they are appropriate for the "at risk" student and present minimal additional cost to the families of these students. It has been frequently found that the cost of participation in some of these courses are excluding the "high risk" student who most needs the courses. He further concludes that the "at risk" students should also not be excluded from the extracurricular programs of a given school because of the cost of such programs.

Johnston et al. (1985) emphasize the importance of early identification and programming for students who exhibit characteristics of dropouts. They point out that an attitude change in the students is required; one that makes the reasons and rewards for school attendance obvious. At the heart of this attitude change is the teacher. Teachers who are flexible, positive, creative, and person-centered, rather than rule and procedure centered, have an increased chance of interrupting the cycle of failure and alienation that leads to dropping out of school.

The reasons for leaving school prematurely are complex and frequently involve a combination of many factors. The signs and symptoms of dropping out are cumulative and may be evident at the elementary school level. Schreiber (1964) contended that failure begins early and can be assessed by the third grade. Schweinhart and

Weikert (1985) conclude that the best way to avoid a high school dropout is to make the elementary school more successful. A special case can also be made for the middle level school. Large numbers of adolescents fail to make the transition either into or out of such middle grades (Mann, 1986). Several studies of school systems that have some type of preschool program (Early Training Project, Murfreesboro, Tennessee; Perry Preschool Project, Ypsilanti, Michigan; and Rome Head Start Program, Rome, Georgia) have found that youngsters who had attended a preschool program were less likely to drop out of high school than were their peers who had not attended preschool. It is obvious from such studies that good early childhood programs are a wise investment of public funds that can benefit children, their families, and all citizens (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1985).

The literature indicates that educators cannot allow the approach to dropouts to become one that views the dropout as a clinical problem with the onus placed upon the student instead of a systemic problem. Approaching the problem clinically allows districts to avoid examining two critical factors: Middle school or junior high school is the first impersonal institution most young people face and many middle schools, and most high schools, are structured in a way that delivers services to young people through fragmented, confusing, and impersonal methods. Identifying youngsters at an early age and offering assistance is a positive step, but solving the student's problems will not make the system more personal, believable, or manageable (Conrath, 1986).

Chapter II has provided an overview of the school dropout and the many contributors to students dropping out of the school setting. Chapter II has also looked at several dropout programs across the nation designed to identify potential dropouts and place them in special programs designed to work closely with the students in an effort to prevent them from dropping out of school. Chapter III will describe the design and methodology of the study.

### CHAPTER III

#### DESIGN OF THE STUDY

##### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the FOCUS program at East Junior High School in the Alexander County School System and to determine the effectiveness of the FOCUS program on students enrolled in the program. The FOCUS program was designed to help students experience positive successes in a public school setting and, therefore, help keep students in school for a longer period of time. The impetus of the study was prompted by: (1) the publicity and severity of the dropout problem locally and throughout the nation; (2) the lack of programs designed to address the dropout problem on the junior high school level; and (3) the need to document a program that had achieved some successes in attempting to deal with the dropout issue.

More specifically, answers to the following questions were sought:

1. Will students enrolled in the FOCUS program experience significant improvement in their self-concept as compared to a similar group of students not enrolled in the program?
2. Will the academic achievement of students enrolled in the FOCUS program be significantly higher as compared to a similar group of students not enrolled in the program as measured by grades earned in language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and health/physical education?

3. Will the number of assignments to the in-school suspension center be significantly lower for those students enrolled in the FOCUS program as compared to a similar group of students not enrolled in the FOCUS program?
4. Will the number of out-of-school suspensions for students enrolled in the FOCUS program decrease significantly as compared to those students in the comparison group?
5. Will the attendance of students involved in the FOCUS program be significantly higher as compared to a similar group not enrolled in the FOCUS program?
6. Will the total battery scale scores of the FOCUS students on the California Achievement Test (CAT) be significantly higher than a similar group of students not enrolled in the FOCUS program?
7. Who are the students enrolled in the FOCUS program and how did the program influence them, their parents, and the school's faculty?

To answer these questions, a research design was developed which assessed the comparison and treatment groups over the entire 1986-1987 school year. Controlling for group equivalency on pretest measures, the quasi-experimental design provided an opportunity for the comparison required to test the first six hypotheses. The seventh question was investigated using interview and school record data concerning the FOCUS program.

### General Description of the FOCUS Program

FOCUS is a highly structured program offering academic courses as well as other experiences for identified students. Basic skills development, through an individualized teaching approach, is the primary mode of academic learning. A group counseling experience was also provided in which the peer group was given guidance in dealing with problems causing disaffection with the school setting.

The sample population consisted of 7th- and 8th-grade students at East Junior High School. Students were identified by one or more of the following criteria: referral from the juvenile court counselor or social service agency; one or more years behind grade level; evidence of past or present disciplinary problems; evidence of past or present attendance problems; and age factors. The concept of FOCUS was to establish a "school within a school" for students who were not coping well with the typical school setting.

In addition to the general criteria listed above, a "typical" FOCUS student showed evidence of one or more of the following characteristics:

1. inability to function properly within the traditional classroom setting
2. sufficient potential to benefit from the program
3. general recognition as an underachiever, i.e., academic skill development below current grade level
4. failure to establish goals regarding his occupational future
5. a lack of motivation, direction, and drive
6. a poor self-image

7. a stressful family situation which appeared to have a detrimental effect on the student
8. hostility toward adults and authority figures
9. identification as a potential dropout
10. difficulty with community and law enforcement agencies

Teachers with certification in the academic areas taught the students throughout the school day with the teachers reporting to the FOCUS classroom instead of students reporting to the individual subject teacher's classrooms. All FOCUS students were enrolled in four academic subjects: math, science, language arts, and social studies. In addition to the academic subjects, all students enrolled in the FOCUS class took physical education during the last period of the school day.

The FOCUS team offered an interdisciplinary approach to the teaching of subject matter which combined individualized and group work based on each student's abilities and needs. Those students targeted were likely to be deficient in basic academic skills and positive social development. The emphasis on each discipline was directed toward meeting the individualized needs, both educational and social. While students may have had deficiencies in basic academic areas, the range of ability was considered to be quite wide and, as a result, an individualized basic skills instructional techniques were used whenever possible.

One of the cornerstones of the FOCUS program was the Family group. The Family group consisted of the FOCUS students, teachers, and

the guidance counselor assigned to the project. These people met together at specified times during the school month. Family was a group process which utilized the peer group to encourage positive youth development and to help students experiencing difficulties work out their problems. In Family, the peer group's influence was orchestrated to deal with problems causing student disaffection with school and home. Students learned through change, growth, and productivity they could gain respect for themselves, others, and their education.

Parents of FOCUS students were involved in the initial recruitment and selection. The parents continued to be involved through parent/teacher/students meetings, individual conferences, and other informal communication concerning the pupil's growth. As a general rule, parents become less involved in schools as their children enter junior high school and the FOCUS staff placed special emphasis on building a positive parent/school communication process. In many cases, parent meetings of the type described represented the first positive contact with the schools that the parents had ever had.

To effectively implement the individualized instructional approach so important to students in FOCUS, an aide in the classroom was necessary. The aide assisted the teachers, did the clerical work necessary, and served as an informal advisor and advocate for the students. The aide's total responsibility was with the FOCUS program which results in stability and support for the program within the organizational structure. At East Junior High School, the aide was considered to be the very foundation of the FOCUS program.



### The Sample

The FOCUS class originally consisted of 15 students who were selected from the school's 7th- and 8th-grade classes based upon teacher recommendation and/or self-referral. The FOCUS staff, guidance counselor, and principal were involved in the final selection of the 15 from a total list of approximately 35 nominations. The faculty and administration nominations for the program evidenced one or more of the previously listed criteria.

When the nomination list was compiled, the principal, guidance counselor in charge of the FOCUS program, and the FOCUS staff arranged the list in priority order of students in need of the services offered by the program. Following the prioritizing of the list, students were called into the guidance counselor's office for a discussion of the potential benefits of the program with the FOCUS aide present in these sessions. If students showed an interest in the program, parents were contacted by the FOCUS aide and the guidance counselor and invited to East Junior High School for an in-depth discussion of the program and the potential benefits to the student. During these discussions, the principal often sat in on at least part of the conference.

If it was decided that the child should be placed in the FOCUS program, permission was obtained in writing from the parents. Students who agreed to participate in the program were offered the opportunity to leave the program after the first nine weeks of the school year. If, after this trial period, the students agreed to remain in the program, they were not allowed to leave until the conclusion of the school year unless removed by the FOCUS staff.

The 15 students in the comparison group were selected from the original list of students whose names had been mentioned for possible inclusion into the FOCUS program based on the same criteria as was applied to those students already enrolled in the program. The major difference between the FOCUS group and the comparison group was that students and their parents in the comparison group decided, for various reasons, not to participate in the program and were, instead, enrolled in regular programs for the entire school year. Students selected for inclusion in the comparison group evidenced many of the same characteristics as the students in the FOCUS group, i.e., low academic achievement, disciplinary difficulties, a pattern of attendance problems, and a potential to drop out of school. Parents were contacted by the guidance counselor and FOCUS aide about the study and permission was obtained from parents before students were included in the comparison group (a copy of that letter is included in the Appendix).

The composition of the FOCUS group included 12 males and 3 females, all of which were Caucasian. There were four 13-year-old, eight 14-year-old, and three 15-year-old students who comprised the FOCUS class. Of the total of 15 students, 5 were seventh graders and 10 were eighth graders. Three of the FOCUS students were eligible for free lunch while one qualified for reduced lunch. The comparison group consisted of 12 males and 3 females all of which were Caucasian. There were two 13-year-old, seven 14-year-old, five 15-year-old students, and one 16-year old student who made up the comparison group. Of the total of 15, 3 were seventh graders, 4 were eighth graders, and 8 were ninth

graders. Two of the comparison group qualified for free lunch and two qualified for reduced lunch.

The original size of the samples decreased during the course of the academic year. Two of the FOCUS students were removed from the program in February and placed in regular programs due to a lack of willingness to attempt work, their general disruption of the FOCUS classroom and other students in the program, and the general lack of progress made while in the FOCUS class. It was felt by the FOCUS staff that continued participation in the program by these students would have a detrimental effect on the program and the other students enrolled in the program. The comparison group's size decreased by four during the school year with two of these students dropping out of school and two moving to other school systems within the state due to family difficulties and/or problems.

#### Data Collection

Data were collected at the end of the 1985-1986 and 1986-1987 school years utilizing the following as methods of collection:

1. Pre- and posttests of the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale were given to both the FOCUS students and the comparison group. Data from the Behavior, Intellectual and School Status, Physical Appearance, Anxiety, Popularity, and Happiness and Satisfaction Subscales were gathered and converted to total raw scores.  $t$  tests for independent samples were run for both the pre- and posttests and the results compared.

2. Student's final grades from both the FOCUS class and the comparison group were collected for the 1985-1986 and 1986-1987 school years; t tests for independent samples were run; and the results compared. Courses were analyzed separately and included language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and health/physical education. Numerical grades for each of the courses were collected and a letter grade of "F" was converted to a numerical number of 69 in order to provide consistency of reporting procedures from the elementary schools to the junior high school.
3. The total number of days assigned to the In-School Suspension Center for the 1985-1986 and 1986-1987 school years was collected for students from FOCUS program and the comparison group. t tests for independent samples were run and the results compared.
4. The total number of days assigned to out-of-school suspension for the 1985-1986 and 1986-1987 school years was collected and compared for students from the FOCUS program and the comparison group. t tests for independent samples were run and the results compared.
5. The total number of days absent from school for both the FOCUS and comparison groups for the 1985-1986 and 1986-1987 school years was collected and compared. t tests for independent samples were run and the results compared.

6. The total battery scores (in scale scores) of both groups of students on the California Achievement Test for the 1985-1986 and 1986-1987 school years were collected and compared. t tests for independent samples were run and the results compared.

The pretest/posttest quasi-experimental design used two groups as indicated in Figure 1: (1) the students involved in the FOCUS program, or the treatment group, and (2) the students in the comparison group who were enrolled in the regular programs component of the school curriculum. The pretest and posttests were administered at the same time to both groups. In this design, the intensive care of the FOCUS program was offered to the treatment group; the comparison group did not receive any of the benefits of the FOCUS program and staff.

<u>Group</u>	<u>Pretest</u>	<u>Treatment</u>	<u>Posttest</u>
FOCUS	0	X	0
Comparison	0		0

1. Two assigned groups are involved in the design.
2. Each group is measured at the same time before treatment is applied to one group--the FOCUS group.
3. The FOCUS group receives the treatment of the FOCUS program during the 1986-87 school year.
4. Each group is measured at the same time at the end of the 1986-87 school year after treatment has been applied.

Figure 1. Diagram of the pretest/posttest quasi-experimental design used in the study.

### The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale

The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (or Piers-Harris), subtitled "The Way I Feel About Myself," is a brief, self-report measure designed to aid in the assessment of self-concept in children and adolescents. Self-concept, as assessed by this instrument, is defined as a relatively stable set of self-attitudes reflecting both a description and an evaluation of one's own behavior and attributes. The scale may be administered either individually or in groups. Children are shown a number of statements that tell how some people feel about themselves, and are asked to indicate whether each statement applies to them using dichotomous "yes" or "no" responses. The responses are then either hand or computer scored to evaluate both general and specific dimensions of self-concept. An overall assessment of self-concept is reflected in three summary scores: a total raw score, a percentile score, and an overall stanine score. Items on the scale are scored in either a positive or negative direction to reflect the self-evaluation dimension. A high score on the scale suggests a positive self-evaluation, whereas a low score suggests a negative self-evaluation (Piers, 1984).

The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale was used in this study to measure increases and decreases in a student's self-concept during the school year and was used for several reasons:

1. the test is an efficient, cost-effective research instrument;
2. it is easy to administer and score; and

3. the subscales present on the test make it possible to track gains or setbacks in specific areas of a student's self-concept.

A number of studies have investigated the test-retest stability of the Piers-Harris with both normal and special samples. The reliability coefficients ranged from .42 (with an interval of eight months) to .96 (with an interval of three to four weeks). The median test-retest reliability was .73. In reviewing these studies, it should be remembered that reliability estimates which are based on more heterogeneous samples are expected to be higher due to less constriction in range (Piers, 1984).

An early study conducted by Piers and Harris (1964) used a 95-item version of the scale with a retest interval of four months, and approximately half of the early standardization sample was used from grades 3, 6, and 10. The resulting coefficients of .72, .71, and .72 were judged satisfactory for a personality instrument in the experimental stage of development, especially given the relatively long test-retest interval. The revised 80-item scale, though shorter, was shown to have better stability using both a two-month and a four-month test-retest interval.

A study by McLaughlin (1970) of normal students in grades 5, 6, and 7 reported stability coefficients ranging from .71 to .75 with a test-retest interval of five months. Platten and Williams conducted two studies (1979, 1981) of the scale's factorial stability and reported test-retest reliabilities. The scale was administered to

white, black and Mexican-American students in grades 4, 5, and 6. The investigators reported reliability coefficients of .65 and .75. A more recent study by Shavelson and Bolus (1982) involving a test-retest interval of five months obtained a reliability coefficient of .81 for a group of white, upper-class seventh and eighth graders. Therefore, temporal stability estimates generally support the results reported with the standardization sample.

Epstein, writing for The Ninth Mental Measurements Yearbook (Mitchell, 1985), concluded that the Piers-Harris is a psychometrically adequate instrument whose usefulness in research has been documented. Research on the instrument itself indicates that it may also be clinically relevant when the results are integrated with other data regarding the individual. Writing for The Ninth Mental Measurements Yearbook (Mitchell, 1985) Jeske, while cautioning the user in the interpretation of specific cluster scales for individual children, further concludes that the Piers-Harris appears to be the best children's self-concept measure currently available.

### Statistical Analysis

A t test for independent samples was used to establish group equivalence and to determine the significance of the results of this study. The mean scores of the treatment group (the FOCUS students) on the major categories of self-concept, academic achievement, days assigned to the In-School Suspension Center, days assigned to out-of-school suspension, attendance, and scores on the California Achievement were compared to the mean scores of the comparison group in the same



categories. The alpha level was set at the .05 level of significance. Thus, a difference between group means with a probability at or below .05 was considered to be significant.

Independent samples are considered to be samples that are formed without any type of matching. The members of one group are not related to members of the other group in any systematic way other than that they are selected from the same population. The expectation is that they are essentially the same at the beginning of a study with respect to performance on the dependent variable. If they are essentially the same at the end of the study, the null hypothesis is not rejected; if they are different at the end of the study, the null hypothesis is rejected, that is, the treatment does make a difference. The t test for independent samples is used to determine whether there is probably a significant difference between the means of two independent samples (Gay, 1981).

The FOCUS group and comparison group generally fit the criteria for using an independent t test analysis. Since, however, the treatment and comparison groups were not randomly selected or assigned, it was very important to establish the initial equivalence of the two groups on the various measures. Pretest data were used to establish group equivalence via a two-tailed independent t test. Posttest data were used, once equivalence was established, to assess significant differences attributable to the FOCUS experience. Since the hypotheses tested were directional a one-tailed t test was employed.

The data for the descriptive section of the analysis was collected by means of an individual interview given to each member of the FOCUS class and the comparison group by the guidance counselors. Guidance counselors were utilized because of the level of trust already established between them and the students. During the process of each interview, the same questions (see Appendix for a list of these questions) were asked of all students and the answers to these questions recorded by the guidance counselors. Other information used for this section was gathered from statements made by classroom teachers, the FOCUS aide, and the students' parents in conversations with them.

Chapter III has examined the FOCUS model and its concept and has also examined the design and the methodology used in comparing the achievements of students enrolled in the FOCUS program to the achievement of students not enrolled in the program but possessing many of the same characteristics evidenced by the FOCUS students. Chapter IV will present the data obtained from the study.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS OF THE STUDY

#### Group Comparison

Students in both the FOCUS and comparison groups were followed throughout the 1986-1987 school year in the areas of self-concept, academic achievement, in-school suspension assignments, out-of-school suspensions, attendance and California Achievement Test scores. Pre-test data on these variables were used to establish equivalence between the treatment and comparison groups. Posttest data obtained from these major categories for the two groups were then compared to determine the effectiveness of the FOCUS program. The purpose of this section of the chapter is to report the quantitative or statistical results of the year-long study of the students.

Treatment and comparison group equivalence. To establish group equivalence,  $t$  test scores were calculated for each of the variables using the pretreatment data for the FOCUS and comparison groups. The first of the major areas studied for group equivalence was self-concept (see Table 1). The mean of the FOCUS group was reported to be 46.77 and the mean of the comparison group was reported to be 50.18. The standard deviation of the FOCUS group was calculated to be 32.80 and the standard deviation of the comparison group was calculated to be 31.29. The  $t$  test value calculated was  $-.26$  and, with significance set at the .05 level, the critical  $t$ -value with 22 degrees of freedom

Table 1

Pretreatment Calculations for Statistical Significance of Focus and Comparison Groups

Hypothesis	Mean	Standard Deviation	Degrees of Freedom	t test Value	Critical t value (two-tailed) .05 level of Significance	Probability Value
<u>Self-Concept</u>						
Focus Comparison	46.77 50.18	32.80 31.29	22	- .26	2.074	.797
<u>Language Arts</u>						
Focus Comparison	70.60 75.80	3.33 7.87	28	-2.36	2.048	.026
<u>Math</u>						
Focus Comparison	69.00 76.13	0.00 8.69	28	-3.18	2.048	.004
<u>Science</u>						
Focus Comparison	69.93 72.07	2.09 5.15	28	-1.49	2.048	.148
<u>Social Studies</u>						
Focus Comparison	74.40 73.87	6.43 7.20	28	-2.29	2.048	.030
<u>Health/PE</u>						
Focus Comparison	69.67 73.07	2.48 7.71	28	-1.62	2.048	.117
<u>ISS</u>						
Focus Comparison	2.87 3.33	3.38 6.07	28	- .26	2.048	.797
<u>Attendance</u>						
Focus Comparison	19.07 13.07	21.00 8.74	28	1.02	2.048	.316
<u>Suspensions</u>						
Focus Comparison	7.60 .93	15.80 2.22	28	1.62	2.048	.117
<u>CAT Scores</u>						
Focus Comparison	674.71 700.92	31.88 56.03	25	-1.73	2.060	.096

was 2.074. As a result of these calculations, it may be stated that there was not a significant difference between the FOCUS and comparison groups on the pretest of the Piers-Harris given at the beginning of the study.

Group equivalence was also established for the academic courses taken by all students prior to the initiation of the study, and language arts was the first of the academic subjects studied. The mean for the FOCUS group in language arts was 70.60 and the mean for the comparison group was 75.80; the standard deviation for the FOCUS group was 3.33 while the standard deviation for the comparison group was found to be 7.87. The t test value was calculated to be -2.36 with 28 degrees of freedom; therefore, a significant difference at the beginning of the study existed between the FOCUS and comparison groups. It should, however, be noted that there were 12 failures in language arts in the FOCUS groups for the 1985-1986 school year while there were only 5 failures in the comparison group during the same time period. Although the difference between the two groups is significant, the difference is in favor of the comparison group. Therefore, should the language arts grades of the FOCUS group on the posttest be significantly higher than the comparison group's, this initial difference would not be a problem.

In the mathematics pretreatment data, it should be noted that all 15 of the FOCUS students failed the subject for the 1985-1986 school year while there were 7 failures for the school year in the comparison group. The mean of the FOCUS group was 69.00 and the mean of the comparison group was 76.13; the standard deviation for the FOCUS group was found to be 0.00 and the standard deviation for the comparison

group was 8.69. The  $t$  test value was calculated to be -3.18 with 28 degrees of freedom and a significant difference was found to exist between the two groups at the beginning of the study. Although the difference between FOCUS and the comparison group was significant, the difference is in favor of the comparison group as was the case in the language arts grades and, therefore, should not present a problem.

The next academic area studied was science and it may be noted that 12 FOCUS students failed science during the 1985-86 school year as compared to 9 failures in the comparison group -or the same time period. The mean of the FOCUS group was 69.93 and the mean of the comparison group was 72.07; the standard deviation for the FOCUS group was calculated to be 2.09 and the standard deviation for the comparison group was found to be 5.15. The  $t$  test value was calculated to be -1.49 with 28 degrees of freedom and it may be stated that there was no significant difference between the two groups at the beginning of the study in science grades.

As in several of the other academic courses, it should be noted that 12 of the 15 FOCUS students failed the social studies course for the school year while there were 6 failures in the comparison group. The mean of the FOCUS group was calculated to be 74.40 while the mean of the comparison group was calculated to be 73.87; the standard deviation was 6.43 for the FOCUS group and 7.20 for the comparison group. The  $t$  test value was calculated to be -2.29 with 28 degrees of freedom; it may, therefore, be stated that there was significant difference between the FOCUS and the comparison group at the beginning of the study. Although there was a significant difference between the

two groups, as in the case of language arts and mathematics, the difference is in favor of the comparison group, i.e., more members of the comparison group passed the course than did the members of the FOCUS group during the 1985-86 school year.

Health/physical education was the last major academic course followed for the FOCUS students and the comparison group in establishing group equivalence. When looking at the total number of failures in this course, it will be found that 14 of the 15 FOCUS students failed the course for the 1985-86 school year and that 7 of the comparison group failed for the same time period. The mean of the FOCUS group was calculated to be 69.67 while the mean of the comparison group was found to be 73.07. Standard deviation for the FOCUS group was calculated to be 2.58 and the standard deviation of the comparison group was found to be 7.71. The  $t$  test value was calculated to be -1.62 with 28 degrees of freedom. It may be stated that there was no significant difference between the two groups at the beginning of the study in health/physical education grades.

Another of the major hypotheses tested was in the area of in-school suspension assignments. The students who were later enrolled in the FOCUS program spent a total of 43 days in the In-School Suspension Center during the 1985-86 school year while the comparison group spent a total of 50 days in the center. The mean of the FOCUS group was calculated to be 2.87 while the mean of the comparison group was found to be 3.33; the standard deviation was found to be 3.38 for the FOCUS group while the standard deviation for the comparison group was

6.07. The calculated  $t$  test value of the FOCUS and comparison groups was found to be  $-.26$  with 28 degrees of freedom. Therefore, there was no significant difference between the number of days assigned to the In-School Suspension Center for either of the two groups at the beginning of the study.

During the 1985-86 school year the students who composed the FOCUS group accumulated a total of 114 days in out-of-school suspensions. By contrast, the comparison group accumulated a total of 14 days during the same time period. Calculations with the pretreatment data indicate a wide range of difference in the standard deviations of both groups. The wide range may be attributed to the fact that a few students in the FOCUS group accumulated a large number of days in out-of-school suspensions while others accumulated either no days or a small number of days. The mean of the FOCUS group was calculated to be 7.60; the mean of the comparison group was found to be .93; the standard deviation of the FOCUS group was found to be 15.80 and for the comparison group was 2.22. The  $t$  test value was found to be 1.62 with 28 degrees of freedom and, therefore, it may be stated that there was no significant difference between the FOCUS and comparison groups at the beginning of the study.

The next major hypothesis studied was student attendance. The total number of days of school missed by members of the FOCUS group was 286 for the 1985-86 school year. This figure may be compared to 196 days missed from school by the members of the comparison group during the same time period. The calculated mean of the FOCUS group is 19.07



and the calculated mean of the comparison group is shown to be 13.07. The standard deviation for the FOCUS group was found to be 21.00 and the standard deviation for the comparison group was 8.74. The calculated  $t$  test value was 1.02 with 28 degrees of freedom; it may be stated that, at the beginning of the study, there was no significant difference between the two groups.

The last of the pretreatment data refers to the scores on the California Achievement Test during the spring of 1986 by members of both the FOCUS and comparison groups. The mean of the FOCUS students on this test was 674.71 and the mean of the comparison group was 700.92; the standard deviation of the FOCUS group was calculated to be 31.88 while the comparison group was found to be 46.03. The  $t$  test value was calculated to be 1.73 with 25 degrees of freedom. Three scores could not be located for students in both the FOCUS and comparison groups which accounts for the decrease in the degrees of freedom from the previous calculations. With significance set at the .05 level, the critical  $t$ -value with 25 degrees of freedom is 2.060. It may be stated, therefore, that no significant differences existed between the two groups at the beginning of the study.

Calculations, as summarized in Table 1, indicate that there were found to exist no significant differences at the beginning of the study--the beginning of the 1986-87 academic year--between the FOCUS and comparison groups in the areas of self-concept, science, health/physical education, in-school suspension assignments, out-of-school suspensions, attendance, and scores on the California Achievement Test.

There were three areas in which significant differences were found to exist--language arts, social studies, and mathematics; however, all of the differences were in favor of the comparison group. Therefore, it may be stated that the FOCUS and comparison groups were equivalent to each other at the beginning of this study.

Posttest results. During the spring of 1987, the posttest of the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale was administered to those students still involved in the FOCUS class as well as those students still included in the comparison group (see Table 2). The mean of the FOCUS group on the posttest was 44.85 and the mean for the comparison group was 49.55. The standard deviation for the FOCUS group was calculated to be 32.43 and 32.98 for the comparison group. The  $t$  test value was  $-.35$  with 22 degrees of freedom. With significance set at the .05 level, the critical  $t$  test value for 22 degrees of freedom is 1.717 due to the administration of a one-tailed  $t$  test in order to establish significance in the positive direction. No significant difference between the FOCUS and comparison groups, therefore, was found to exist in the area of self-concept as indicated by the administration of the Piers-Harris at the conclusion of the study.

Another major objective of the study was to determine if a significant difference, i.e., a positive  $t$  test value, in the academic courses occurred between the FOCUS and comparison groups during the course of the 1986-87 school year. It should be noted that there were two failures in the FOCUS group while the number of failures in language arts in the comparison group rose to six. The mean for the

Table 2

Posttest Calculations for Statistical Significance of Focus and  
Comparison Groups

Hypothesis	Mean	Standard Deviation	Degrees of Freedom	t test Value	Critical t value (two- tailed) .05 level of Significance	Proba- bility
<u>Self-Concept</u>						
Focus	44.85	32.43	22	- .35	1.717	.365
Comparison	49.55	32.98				
<u>Language Arts</u>						
Focus	83.54	8.98	22	2.96	1.717	.004
Comparison	73.55	7.26				
<u>Math</u>						
Focus	78.08	7.46	22	1.26	1.717	.111
Comparison	74.36	6.86				
<u>Science</u>						
Focus	88.00	7.70	22	7.66	1.717	.000
Comparison	69.82	1.60				
<u>Social Studies</u>						
Focus	80.85	7.91	22	2.49	1.717	.011
Comparison	73.82	5.38				
<u>Health/PE</u>						
Focus	76.69	5.69	22	3.98	1.717	.001
Comparison	69.94	1.50				
<u>ISS</u>						
Focus	2.31	2.43	22	-1.81	1.717	.042
Comparison	4.45	3.36				
<u>Attendance</u>						
Focus	8.54	5.91	22	-2.15	1.717	.022
Comparison	16.64	12.03				
<u>Suspensions</u>						
Focus	3.38	3.75	22	- .42	1.717	.339
Comparison	4.27	6.40				
<u>CAT Scores</u>						
Focus	703.85	29.37	22	- .29	1.717	.388
Comparison	708.09	42.25				

FOCUS group in language arts was 83.54 and the mean for the comparison group was 73.55. Standard deviation for the FOCUS group was calculated to be 8.98 while the standard deviation for the comparison group was found to be 7.26. The  $t$  test value was 2.96 with 22 degrees of freedom; with the level of significance set at the .05 level, the critical  $t$  test value is 1.717. Therefore, it may be said that a significant difference existed between the FOCUS and comparison groups at the end of the 1986-87 school year--the end of the study--in the subject of language arts.

At the end of the 1986-87 school year, the FOCUS group showed four failures in math as compared to six in the comparison group. The mean of the FOCUS group was 78.08 ; the mean of the comparison group was 74.36; standard deviation was calculated to be 7.46 for the FOCUS group and 6.86 for the comparison group. The  $t$  test value was calculated to be 1.26 with 22 degrees of freedom in this comparison. It may, therefore, be stated that there was not a significant difference between the final grades of the FOCUS and comparison groups for the 1986-87 school year. Although the groups started out significantly different at the beginning of the study with the comparison group ahead of the FOCUS group, considerable progress was made by the members of the FOCUS group in math during the study as indicated by the  $t$  test value moving from -3.18 to 1.26 at the conclusion of the study.

The final averages of both groups of students for the 1986-87 school year in science were also calculated and it should be noted that the number of failures in the FOCUS group was reduced to zero

while the number of failures in the comparison group was reduced by one to eight failures. As before, the averages of the FOCUS group and the comparison group were compared by means of the calculation of  $t$  test values. The mean of the FOCUS group was 88.00 and the mean of the comparison group was 69.82. Standard deviation for the FOCUS group was calculated to be 7.70 and 1.60 for the members of the comparison group. The calculated  $t$  test value was found to be 7.66 with 22 degrees of freedom and there was a significant difference between the FOCUS group's and the comparison group's final science grades for the 1986-87 school year which was also the conclusion of the study.

The number of course failures in social studies during the 1986-87 school year was reduced to one in the FOCUS class while the number of course failures in the comparison group dropped to three. When the FOCUS and the comparison groups' social studies final grades were compared, a significant difference was found to exist. The mean of the FOCUS group was calculated to be 80.85 while the mean of the comparison group was calculated to be 73.82. Also calculated was the standard deviation for the FOCUS group of 7.91 and 5.38 for the comparison group. The  $t$  test value was found to be 2.49 with 22 degrees of freedom; thus, a significant difference was found to exist between the two groups in social studies at the end of the study.

Health/physical education was the last major academic course followed for the FOCUS students and the comparison group. It should be noted that the number of course failures in health/physical education was reduced to one in the FOCUS group while the number of failures

in the comparison group rose to eight during the 1986-87 school year. The calculated mean of the FOCUS group was 76.69 while the calculated mean of the comparison group was 69.64. Standard deviation of the FOCUS group was found to be 5.69 and 1.50 for the comparison group. The calculated  $t$  test value was 3.98 with 22 degrees of freedom. Therefore, it may be stated that there was a significant difference between the final health/physical education grades of the FOCUS students and the students in the comparison group at the conclusion of the study.

The third major objective of the FOCUS program was to reduce the number of assignments to the In-School Suspension Center for the students enrolled in the FOCUS program and, therefore, allow other students who had committed much less serious offenses to be served by the center. Students in the FOCUS class were assigned a total of 50 days in the In-School Suspension Center while the comparison students received a total of 49 days assigned to in-school suspension. The mean of the FOCUS group was found to be 2.31; the mean of the comparison group was calculated to be 4.45; and the standard deviation for the FOCUS group was 2.43 and the comparison group was 3.86. The calculated  $t$  test value was found to be -1.81 with 22 degrees of freedom so that there was a significant difference between the FOCUS group and the comparison group in terms of days assigned to the In-School Suspension Center.

One major difference that was found to exist between the two groups was the nature of the assignments to in-school suspension. The

two major reasons for assignment to in-school suspension for the students in the FOCUS class were: (1) smoking and (2) fighting. On the other hand, the major reasons for assignment to in-school suspension by the members of the comparison group were (1) skipping class; (2) general disruption of class(es); and (3) refusal to cooperate with teachers and administration.

Another of the major goals of the FOCUS program was to reduce the number of out-of-school suspensions. The data indicate that FOCUS students were assigned a total of 44 days in out-of-school suspensions while the comparison group received a total of 47 days. As calculated, the mean of the FOCUS group was found to be 3.38 while the mean of the comparison group was found to be 4.27. The calculated t test value was found to be -.42 with 22 degrees of freedom. It may be stated that, at the end of the study, there was no significant difference between the FOCUS and comparison groups.

As was the case in the nature of the in-school suspension assignments, the reasons for out-of-school suspensions differed. The major reason for FOCUS students receiving out-of-school suspensions was fighting with another member of the FOCUS class; never was a student in the FOCUS class suspended for fighting with another member of the regular student body. The major reasons for students in the comparison group receiving out-of-school suspensions were: (1) alcohol on campus; (2) smoking; (3) general disruption of class(es); and (4) failure to cooperate with teachers and administrators.

The fifth major objective of the FOCUS program was to increase the attendance of students enrolled in the program. Absences are higher in homes where parents must be at work before the school buses begin their routes and those students involved in FOCUS evidenced a high rate of absenteeism often because there was no one to see that they got out of bed and on the school bus. One of the primary responsibilities of the FOCUS aide was to call students who were absent within five minutes after classes began each morning and, in several cases, go to the student's house, pick them up, and have them in school within 30 minutes.

The total days absent for FOCUS students during the 1986-1987 school year was found to be 111, while the total days absent for members of the comparison group was 183. The mean of the FOCUS class was 8.54, and the mean of the comparison group was 16.64. Standard deviation was calculated to be 5.91 for the FOCUS group and 12.03 for the comparison group. The calculated t test value was -2.15 with 22 degree of freedom. Therefore, it may be stated that there was a significant difference between the number of days absent for FOCUS students and the comparison group.

The results of the administration of the 1986-1987 CAT were also analyzed for this study, and, as in all other cases, scores were not reported for the two students who were removed from the FOCUS program nor for the four students in the comparison group who either moved or quit school. The mean of the FOCUS group was calculated to



be 703.85 while the mean of the comparison group was calculated to be 708.09. It should be noted that the mean of the FOCUS students increased by over 25 points from the 1985-1986 test to the 1986-1987 test, while the comparison group increased only eight points. The standard deviation of the FOCUS group was found to be 29.37 while the standard deviation of the comparison group was 42.25. The calculated t test value was  $-.29$  with 22 degrees of freedom. It may, therefore, be stated that no significant difference existed between the two groups at the conclusion of the 1986-1987 school year, also the end of the study.

As summarized by Table 2, it may be stated that there were significant differences found to exist between the FOCUS group and the comparison group at the end of the 1986-1987 academic year, which was also the conclusion of the study, in the following areas: attendance, in-school suspension assignments, language arts grades, science grades, social studies grades, and health/physical education grades. In the areas of self-concept improvement, California Achievement Test scores, out-of-school suspensions, and mathematics grades, there were no significant differences found to exist between the two groups. It should be noted that, for the category of mathematics, the mean difference was in the predicted direction as indicated by the t value moving from a negative value to a positive value. In the out-of-school suspensions category, the mean difference was also in the predicted direction as indicated by the t value moving from a

positive value to a negative value indicating a decrease in the total number of days served on out-of-school suspensions.

### FOCUS Student and Program Profiles

The posttreatment data reported in the previous section yield significant differences in a number of content and performance areas studies. To convey the impact of the FOCUS program in more human terms, a series of profiles of each student has been developed. These profiles include such information as home life, grades, attitude toward school, attendance, and discipline records. The profiles provide an additional set of rich data that substantially add to the understanding of the problem.

The "baggage" that a student brings to the school environment is often an indicator of success in that environment and knowledge by personnel in a school can be of tremendous assistance in working with the student to prevent dropping out of school. A short description of each of the students enrolled in the FOCUS program will follow. These profiles are based on data gathered in interviews of the students by the guidance counselors, reports of comments and reflections from the teaching staff, the principal, and parents. Data from the cumulative records regarding attendance, grades, and discipline are also included.

Student 001. Student 001 is a very quiet and meek young person whose parents have been divorced since the student was a baby. Student

001 was abused by his father before the divorce according to the student's mother. This student has four brothers and sisters whom the mother is raising without help from anyone else. The mother must leave for work very early in the morning, and the children are expected to get up on their own and get to school. The previous year this student frequently did not make it to school and, as a result, ran into difficulties with the school system attendance policy and failed for the 1985-1986 year. Student 001 was enrolled in the FOCUS program for the 1986-1987 school year when he referred himself to a guidance counselor "about that special program."

In an interview conducted with this student, it was stated that the student enjoyed coming to school because "it gets me out of the house" and "it's boring at home when all my friends are at school." The student further stated that "there is no use in fussing with the teachers; they'll win anyway" and, as a result, this student has never experienced major discipline difficulties with either the teachers or the administrators. This student had one major problem during the 1986-1987 school year which resulted in a 10-day out-of-school suspension for possession of drugs on the school campus. Student 001 further intends to graduate from high school but "will get a job . . . I probably won't go to college."

Student 001 missed 13 days of school the previous year with no out-of-school suspensions. During the 1986-1987 school year, 10 days of school were missed in addition to a 10-day out-of-school

suspension for the prohibited substance which he stated "was a stupid thing to do . . . but my friends were doing it." This student failed every course but one for the 1985-1986 academic year and, at the end of the 1986-1987 academic year had passed all of the courses. In addition, this student will return to the FOCUS classroom at his own request for the next school year.

Student 002. Student 002 is the middle child and suffers from the "middle child syndrome." From his own statements to the FOCUS aide, this student feels that his parents do not care about him and feels that the parents care more about the older brother and younger sister. Student 002 does not care because he did not think anybody cared what he thought one way or the other. Throughout the school year, this student's most used expression was "whatever." He stopped caring about school because he believed that his parents did not seem to care if he passed or failed.

In the interview, student 002 stated that he never studied or took books home. As a result, this student failed every course but one for the 1985-1986 school year and was retained in the seventh grade. He further stated that his class conduct was "OK most of the time although when my conduct is not good, I give the teacher and the other students a rough time." This student further felt that he "didn't get along with most of his teachers." When asked about his attitude toward school, student 002 quickly replied "I don't like it really" and further stated that he felt that school "doesn't help

me at all and . . . helps me get mad." When asked his plans after graduation, student 002 stated "I doubt I ever will graduate. I'm not smart enough."

Student 002 did not refer himself to the FOCUS program but was referred by the principal who noticed that the student was spending more time in the halls outside of classes than he was in classes. When the guidance counselor talked with him about the program, he agreed to "give it a try." This student's grades had improved dramatically by the end of the 1986-87 school year with no course failures for the year compared to having failed five of the six academic courses the previous year. However, student 002 scored below the 25th percentile on the California Achievement Test and was retained in the eighth grade contingent upon completion of summer school. When told that, at the end of the summer program, another test like the CAT would be administered to determine promotion, he became scared and announced that he would not be in summer school as "he could not pass the test since he could not read it." He further stated that his parents had told him he could drop out of school when he turned 16 in April of 1988. As of the end of the school year, student 002 had made plans to return to FOCUS for the next academic year.

Student 003. Student 003 is from a home affected by divorce and lives with his mother and older sister. In his interview he stated that he "was good in class . . . I enjoy class" and that he and his teachers "get along very well." As a result of this attitude, student

003 is not a major discipline problem to teachers or the administration and had only spent six days assigned to the In-School Suspension Center during the 1985-86 school year. When he disagreed with a teacher, he stated, "I keep it to myself and go ahead and do what I'm told." At the beginning of this year, he felt that his grades "are the best I can do . . . Last year I didn't do anything, but I'm working a lot harder this year." This student failed three of the five academic courses for the 1985-86 school year and was retained in the seventh grade. This student also experienced difficulties with the local law enforcement authorities during the 1985-86 school year; however, these problems were not related to school life.

At the beginning of the 1986-87 school year, the student referred himself to the FOCUS aide and asked to be included in the program. Student 003 spent no days in the In-School Suspension Center and missed only three days of school--all due to illness. He further passed all subjects for the year making the yearly "B" honor roll. From the student's personal appearance, it is obvious that he feels better about himself and his situation at home. He stated "that I feel that things are beginning to work out at home" and will return to the FOCUS program next year.

Student 004. Student 004 comes from a large family of seven children and is an extremely quiet child. She stated in the interview that she did enough to get by in elementary school but when she entered junior high school, the work was harder to do and, instead of trying harder, she simply quit working. This student failed three of the five

academic subjects which resulted in her retention at the seventh grade level.

Student 004's attendance has never been a major problem as attested to by her in the interview. She stated that "my attendance is good . . . I come to school just about all the time." She further admitted that "my study habits are not too good . . . I do homework, but I really don't study that hard." Discipline is not a major problem with this student as she spent no days assigned to in-school suspension and she states that she and her teachers "get along." Student 004 does admit that "my attitude toward school is not too good. . . I don't like school very much." She does admit, however, that "school can help me learn and make a career for myself" which includes the possibility of being a hair stylist.

Student 004 talked with one of the guidance counselors at the beginning of the 1986-87 school year and referred herself to the FOCUS program. Results show that she passed every course for the academic year. The total number of days missed from school for this year dropped to one day absent due to illness from five the previous year, and there were no discipline assignments or referrals from the FOCUS classroom during the 1985-86 school year. This student will return to the FOCUS program at her own request for the next school year.

Student 005. Student 005 comes from a family with an alcoholic father, his mother, and one older brother. This student's mother and brother have accepted the father's drinking problem as something they have no control over; however, this student has not made that decision.

At the beginning of this school year, student 005 lived "in his own world" protected from his father's rampages. Whenever the student received punishment from the school, it could be counted on that the father would call the school or a school authority at home in a drunken rage requesting the school authority to "meet him off of school grounds." This student missed nine days from school and further failed every course that was taken during the sixth grade. He was socially promoted by the elementary school to the junior high school at the conclusion of the 1985-86 school year.

In his interview, student 005 admitted that his study habits were "not too good . . . I don't take books home" and that his class conduct was "bad . . . I talk too much." He further admitted that "my attitude toward school is poor . . . I just don't like school that much." He does, however, plan to graduate from high school and "get a job at a local furniture factory." During the 1986-87 school year, the student missed a total of 10 days of school, eight of which were due to out-of-school suspensions primarily due to fighting with other members of the FOCUS class. The pattern that usually developed was that such outbursts generally occurred when the father had been drinking more heavily than usual and the student was faced with the probability of a long weekend of his father's drunken rages.

The student was referred to the FOCUS program by a number of his subject teachers in the regular program's component of the school's curriculum due to his misconduct in their classes, and he experienced passing grades in all subjects; however, such progress was not made



easily. Much time was spent working with the student during "free time" or after school hours in an attempt to reach the student and make him understand that the work would have to be done. Some progress had been made by the end of the 1986-87 school year in helping this student cope with the difficulties at home; however, he has now moved into a new dilemma at home. The student's mother has told him he must either accept his father's drinking or move out of the home without her as she has made her choice to stay in the home with her husband. Student 005 will return to the FOCUS program at his own request next school year.

Student 006. Student 006 never experienced major discipline problems during the 1985-86 school year and tended to be one of those students who simply faded into "nonexistence" in the regular classroom. This student failed every academic course but one during the 1985-86 school year and was retained in the seventh grade. He admitted that "he liked to go to school to see his friends but he hated to work." He further stated that when he disagreed with a teacher or a rule, he "usually gets mad . . . I usually start fussing at them and feel like I want to hit them but I don't because I know I'll get into real trouble." Student 006 further missed eight days of school, three due to an out-of-school suspension.

After referring himself to one of the guidance counselors at the beginning of the 1986-87 school year and subsequent enrollment in the FOCUS program, student 006 felt that his grades "are better than they have ever been" and that he and his teachers "get along most of the

time . . . I like most of them." This student missed only five days from school during the 1986-87 school year. In addition, there were no out-of-school suspensions during the 1986-87 school year. Student 006 further passed all academic subjects for the school year, admitted that "school can help me learn about things I don't know," and will return to the FOCUS program the next academic year.

Student 007. Student 007 lives with his divorced mother and her boyfriend. He has an older brother whom he idolizes and who has been sent to training schools and mental hospitals over the past two years. Student 007 expressed a desire "to be just like him." This student was a sixth grader at one of the elementary schools, failed every course for the 1985-86 school year, and was socially promoted to the junior high school. This student admitted that his class conduct "is not too good. After lunch I always act up and stuff." He further admitted that he and his teachers "don't get along . . . I don't like teachers." He further stated that "when I disagree with a teacher or a rule, I usually get in trouble. If I disagree with a rule, I don't do what it says. If I disagree with a teacher, I tell her what I think about it." Numerous referrals from the regular programs teachers and a parental request for help placed the student in the FOCUS program shortly after the school year began.

During the interview, the student further stated that "my grades are not too good . . . I've been slowing down. I don't like school work period." When asked if he planned to graduate, student 007 stated "I'm not going to graduate . . . when I turn 16, I'm outa here!"

After much effort to work with this student in the FOCUS program, the decision was made to return him to the regular programs component as he was disrupting the FOCUS class and refusing to complete assignments. After his return to the regular classroom, his misbehavior continued and skipping classes began to occur. Following repeated assignments to the In-School Suspension Center with no results, long-term out-of-school suspensions were begun by the administration. Student 007 began to run away from home for extended periods of time and his mother finally took out an undisciplined juvenile petition with the court system in June of 1987.

Student 008. Student 008 came into the junior high school this year on a social promotion from the elementary school. While in the elementary school, the student had received suspensions from school during two separate school years for possession of marijuana on campus. This student was absent for 29 days during the sixth grade year; primarily due to out-of-school suspensions. He had further failed every course for the 1985-86 school year and was placed in the regular programs at the junior high school level.

Student 008 was referred to the FOCUS program by the principal who began to notice a pattern of tardiness, absenteeism, and classroom difficulties. He entered the program telling the teachers and aides "he didn't know why they wanted him." During the 1986-87 school year, continued difficulties with drugs, spending long periods of time away from home, and problems with his parents resulted in his parents taking out an undisciplined juvenile petition against him and his assignment

to the juvenile court counselor. From that point on, the parents were extremely supportive of the school's efforts and cooperated in any way asked by the school.

When asked a question relative to school attendance, he replied "my attendance in school is pretty good . . . I can't miss any more days now that I'm on probation." He further admitted his study habits were "terrible . . . I do my homework . . . I have to now that I'm on probation . . . I don't study for tests." He further feels that his grades are "terrible" and that "I can't be tardy to any classes . . . I have to be on time everyday now that I'm on probation." When asked in the interview what he thought of his teachers, he replied that "my teachers and I get along OK . . . I guess . . . I don't like them but I don't let them know that."

At the end of the 1986-87 school year, student 008 had reduced the number of days absent to 10 with three of those days resulting from an out-of-school suspension. He further had passed one course out of the five academic courses offered; however, his behavior and attitude had improved dramatically. He also had been "turned on" to the use of the computers by the class and used them often because "the teachers can read what I'm trying to say without trying to read my lousy handwriting." This student will be returned to the FOCUS program next year at the request of the juvenile court counselor and his parents.

Student 009. Student 009 was adopted at the age of two years by his aunt and uncle whom he now calls his mom and dad. This student

would see his biological mother when she visited her sister; however, she would not acknowledge his existence while in the house. Student 009 deeply resented his aunt and uncle for adopting him and did everything he could to punish them for adopting him including misbehavior at school. He was further hurt when his real mother would visit in the home on his birthdays and not even wish her son a happy birthday. The anger built up over the years and the student became involved in drug-related problems both in school and out of school.

Student 009 spent more time in the main office, referred for disciplinary problems, than he did in classes. The cycle began with the student creating a problem in class immediately at the beginning of class, referral to the office by the teacher, suspension by the assistant principal, and calling the mother to come pick him up at school immediately. When the student returned, the same pattern was repeated so that the student spent 48 days on out-of-school suspensions during the 1985-86 school year with a total of 75 days missed. The student failed every course during the 1985-86 academic year.

Upon return to school during the 1986-87 academic year, the student was immediately placed in FOCUS by the principal as a means to help insure that the same "game" would not be played during the year. He did admit at the beginning of the year that "I don't like school" and "when I disagree with a teacher, I usually get in trouble . . . I get mad and talk back." When asked what he planned to do after graduating from high school, he replied "I doubt I will . . . I'm going to quit when I turn 16--that's in August."

During the course of the 1986-87 school year, student 009 began to mature and accept teacher's and administrator's efforts to work with him. This student was the student most looked-up to by the remainder of the FOCUS class and, although he initially fought the role of class leader, he gradually came to accept the role. Student 009's absenteeism was reduced to 18 days; six of which were due to two out-of-school suspensions for fighting. At the end of the current school year, all five courses had been passed.

During the latter part of the school year, the student became more of the mature class leader that he had been told repeatedly he was. The principal witnessed one occasion in which he announced to the class that they did not deserve a particular break in the afternoon and the rest of the class took a vote to determine if they did indeed deserve the break. There was not one vote in the class that said they thought they deserved the break.

Student 009 worked himself into a somewhat "tight corner" toward the end of the year that possibly could have resulted in an out-of-school suspension that would have carried him over the 20 day absentee policy and would have, as a result, failed him for the year. In discussing options with him relative to his behavior, the possibility of summer school was mentioned as a way to catch up. Student 009 readily accepted this idea and even went further when he stated, "I have decided to return to school next year and am looking forward to going on to high school." This student requested that he remain in the FOCUS program for the next school year because "I know that I will get

in trouble if I get out in regular programs." As the year progressed, the increase in the student's self-concept became obvious as his neatness in grooming and in clothing would attest.

Student 010. When asked what his plans were after high school, student 010 replied "I'm going to play professional football." This statement was evidence of the "dream world" this student existed in as a means of escaping his home situation. Student 010's father is a violent person which has resulted in the mother pressing charges against him for beating her and the children. This student told the FOCUS class one day that he escaped into this "dream world" whenever his father would get violent and begin beating him up. The problem became evident when the student was suspended from school during the 1985-86 school year and another principal called the school to ask why this person was standing out in the woods behind his school in the rain.

Student 010 scored third year, first month on the 1986 CAT, failed all academic courses, was retained for the school year, and was referred to the FOCUS program by numerous regular program teachers at the beginning of the 1986-87 school year. He admitted that "my study habits are not that good . . . I don't do my homework or study for tests" and that "I don't like school." When he disagrees with a teacher, he stated "I usually get mad . . . I do what I'm told, but I say things about it in my head."

At the end of the 1986-87 school year, student 010 reduced his absences from 13 days to seven with three of the days as a result of an out-of-school suspension. He further passed four academic courses

and failed only one. Although conditions have improved in the home, the student still tends to "tune out" those around him in the school and the decision has been made that all that can be done by the school to help him has been done; therefore, student 010 will be returned to the regular programs curriculum in the fall.

Student 011. Student 011 was another of those students who spent more time on out-of-school suspensions than he did in school. When asked about his attitude toward school, he stated, "I hate school." Many of this student's problems began when his father dropped him off at school the first day of his first grade year and told him he was leaving the family. Over the years, student 011 attempted to contact his father and, when he reached him by telephone, he was told to stay away and never try to contact his father again. He further stated that being tardy to school was "OK for me . . . it's that much longer I don't have to be in school."

As a result of these problems, student 011 scored third year, third month on the 1986 CAT by simply playing "connect the dots" on the test. He further was absent for 60 days from school; 43 of these being through out-of-school suspensions for class disruptions. He failed every course for the 1985-86 school year and was retained in the seventh grade for the third consecutive time. At his mother's request, this student was placed in the FOCUS program since in her own words "she couldn't do anything with him."

The student got along well for a while in the FOCUS classroom and was one of the two main leaders in the class although he tended



to lead in the wrong direction most of the time. Student 011's tardiness and attendance began to grow worse and worse with no effort made by the mother to correct the situation other than to call the principal and ask him "to call home and get him out of bed." Eventually, the school attendance counselor took out papers on student 011 and his mother for nonattendance and the student was dropped from the FOCUS program and placed under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court counselor. About one month prior to the ending of school, it was heard that the student's father had appeared back on the scene and that the student's mother had remarried him.

Student 012. Student 012 has developed a very low self-concept due primarily to comparison by her family to the older sister. Both appear to be extreme opposites with the older sister doing nothing wrong and student 012 never doing anything right. Student 012 has called herself the "black sheep" of the family and feels that she can never live up to her sister's image. During the 1985-86 school year, student 012 missed 21 days due to absences which resulted in her retention, and failed three of the five academic courses.

In her interview, student 012 admitted that "my study habits are not so good . . . Homework is out of the question, but I do good in school." She further stated that "my class conduct is OK . . . It could be better . . . I talk too much." When student 012 disagrees with a teacher, "I usually get really mad and fuss at them . . . I smart-mouth them" and she readily admits that "I don't like school. . . before I came into FOCUS, I was going to drop out since I can't pass in mainstream classes . . . I can't do the homework or hack the

teachers." This student wants to be a beautician; however, "I don't see how school can help me with that."

Student 012 sought out a guidance counselor and referred herself to "that FOCUS program" at the beginning of the 1986-87 school year as a means of "wanting to do better than I did last year." At the conclusion of the current academic year, the student had decreased the total number days absent to seven. All academic courses were passed for the school year and the student has requested to be placed in FOCUS for the next school year.

Student 013. Student 013's main problem is responding to peer pressure. This student fell in with the wrong crowd upon her arrival at the junior high level and began lying and stealing which created problems for her at home as well as school. She stated when asked her opinion about school that "it is OK . . . I like to come to school to see my friends." This student was an extremely quiet student and another of those who simply fade into the background of a teacher's classroom. Student 013 did experience some attendance difficulties during the 1985-86 school year missing a total of 14 days although she was not a discipline problem. She failed all five of her academic courses and was retained.

At the beginning of the 1986-87 school year, student 013 referred herself to the FOCUS program commenting "that last year was a lousy year." Attendance problems continued to lessen with a total of eight days missed all due to illness. She passed all five academic courses and has stated that she "knows what the program can do for me" and has asked to continue in the program next year.

Student 014. Student 014 is another example of a student who must live with an alcoholic father who has been drinking since the student was a small child. The father has only recently quit drinking due to health problems created by the excessive drinking. To compound the student's problems, he and his father do not get along well with each other. The student further stutters when he talks and has told the FOCUS class during a Family session that he skipped school in the elementary grades because he was teased by the other students. By his own description, "my study habits are bad . . . I never study" and "my attendance is not too good . . . I miss a lot . . . I just stay out." When asked his plans after high school, student 014 stated "I'm not going to graduate."

Student 014 failed all courses but one on the elementary school level, and the elementary school chose to socially promote him to the junior high school where he started out the year giving major problems to the regular academic teachers. Upon recommendation of the principal, student 014 was placed in the FOCUS class. At the conclusion of the 1986-87 school year, the student's attendance problems had been reduced from a high of 11 absences the previous year to seven absences. In addition, the student passed three of the five academic classes and, upon recommendation of the Promotion/Retention Committee, was promoted to the eighth grade. Student 014 will return to the FOCUS program next school year.

Student 015. Student 015 lives at home with his mother who is confined to a wheelchair for the rest of her life, a stepfather, and

an older brother who has dropped out of school and cannot hold down a steady job. He states that "school is alright . . . I like it OK" and he has never been considered a major discipline problem. Student 015 missed 15 days of school during his sixth grade year. In addition, he failed all five of the academic courses and was placed by the elementary school to the junior high level.

This student was referred to FOCUS by several classroom teachers who found that he was not doing anything in class other than becoming a discipline problem. At the end of the 1986-87 academic year, the student had passed all but one of his academic courses. The number of days absent decreased by one day primarily due to eight days suspension out of school for smoking. Student 015 will return to FOCUS next year of his own choice.

Table 3 attempts to summarize for the reader the profiles of each of the students enrolled in the FOCUS program. It becomes evident from this table that the potential dropout may not always be classified by a "set of criteria" nor do potential dropouts always show evidence of the same characteristics. Table 3 data level evidence supports the theory that potential dropouts may occur across a wide spectrum of society in all socioeconomic groups and home situations.

#### Faculty and Parent Perceptions of the FOCUS Program

The response of the faculty members of East Junior High School toward the FOCUS program has been most positive. As one teacher said, "Finally, there is a program that seems to help both students and

Table 3

Summary of Qualitative Data for FOCUS Students

ID No.	Race	Sex	Level	Reduced Lunch	Lives With	School Aware of Problems in the Home	Courses failed		Absences		ISS Assignments		OSS Assignments		Attitude toward School	
							Prior to FOCUS	During FOCUS	Prior to FOCUS	During FOCUS	Prior to FOCUS	During FOCUS	Prior to FOCUS	During FOCUS	Prior to FOCUS	During FOCUS
001	C	M	8		Mother	no	4	0	13	20	7	4	0	10	positive	positive
002	C	M	8		Parents <sup>a</sup>	no	4	0	7	1	6	0	0	0	negative	positive
003	C	M	8		Parents	no	3	0	4	3	6	0	0	0	positive	positive
004	C	F	8	free	Parents	no	3	0	5	1	0	0	0	0	positive	positive
005	C	M	7	Reduced	Parents	yes	5	0	9	10	0	3	0	8	negative	positive
006	C	M	8		Parents	no	4	0	8	5	0	3	3	0	positive	positive
007	C	M	7	free	Mother	yes	5	0	2	removed from program	0	removed from program	0	removed from program	negative	removed from program
008	C	M	7		Parents	yes	5	4	29	10	0	6	10	3	negative	positive
009	C	M	8		Parents	yes	5	0	25	18	3	5	48	6	negative	positive
010	C	M	8	free	Mother	yes	5	1	13	7	8	0	10	3	negative	positive
011	C	M	8		Parents	yes	5	0	60	removed from program	5	removed from program	43	removed from program	negative	removed from program
012	C	F	8		Parents	no	3	0	21	7	0	0	0	0	positive	positive
013	C	F	8		Parents	no	5	0	14	8	8	0	0	0	positive	positive
014	C	M	7		Parents	yes	4	2	11	7	0	6	0	6	positive	positive
015	C	M	7		Parents	yes	5	1	15	14	0	3	0	8	positive	positive

<sup>a</sup>Both parents.

teachers." The teachers now feel that they have an avenue to pursue that will allow a student to be placed in the FOCUS program at a much quicker rate than the massive testing required for admittance into the special education program components of the school curriculum. One teacher has freely admitted that "I will never refer to special programs because it takes so long to get the student help." The faculty also feels that the FOCUS class gives the administration another option in dealing with the disruptive student rather than "playing the game" of suspension. Several faculty have commented on the change in students since they were enrolled in the FOCUS program from their classes and stated "that cannot be the same student that was in my classroom." In support of the faculty's response to the program, the number of nominations to the FOCUS program consistently outnumbers the seats available in the FOCUS classroom.

An argument could be advanced by someone not familiar with the FOCUS program that the teachers involved in the FOCUS program taught and graded differently from those teachers in the regular programs component of the school's curriculum. However, the five teachers in the FOCUS program perceived at the beginning of the program that the students who entered the FOCUS program were examples of the failure of the "standard" methods of education and had experienced little positive reinforcement during their years in regular programs. It was decided that, in order to stimulate students, some positive experiences would need to be experienced by them. However, it was strongly supported by all involved in the initial planning stages of the program that grades

were not to be "given" to students. Instead, a new approach was collectively instituted in the FOCUS classroom designed to motivate students to complete classwork and to provide students with some positive experiences in the classroom. It was felt that, by providing positive experiences to FOCUS students, they would experience some successes in areas in which they had never achieved or felt success prior to enrollment in the program.

The first rule implemented in the FOCUS classroom was that failure was not acceptable. Any papers turned in to be graded were returned to students if the grades on those papers were less than a passing grade and incomplete papers were also returned for completion. Incomplete papers were completed and unacceptable work was redone during a student's study hall time and not during academic class time. If the required papers were still not completed, parents were immediately notified and students remained after school on the day of the unacceptable assignment until the assigned project was completed to the teacher's satisfaction. If necessary, the subject area teacher or the FOCUS aide provided transportation home for the student.

The small number of students in the classroom allowed the FOCUS aide and the subject teacher to give more one-on-one attention to students who were experiencing difficulties than is possible in the regular classroom. The small number also allowed the subject teacher to individualize instruction and gear the levels of the lessons to the levels of the students. Thus, students could begin to work on a level at which they could experience some successes and could gradually begin to work on increasingly difficult materials.

All faculty members were required to conduct at least one Family session during the school year and to participate in "emergency" Family sessions that were held during their academic class period. In so doing, the FOCUS students began to perceive their subject teachers as human beings with thoughts and feelings of their own. The students, as a result, became more comfortable with the teachers and began to ask more questions during class lectures. As one student stated, "I was embarrassed in mainstream classes to ask questions, but never in FOCUS because I felt comfortable with the teachers and other students here."

When queried on this subject, the FOCUS staff felt that the reduction of numbers in the classroom, the presence of the FOCUS aide, the attitude of not accepting failure, and the trust that developed between students and staff were mainly responsible for the increase in academic achievement that occurred during the 1986-1987 school year. In addition, with this increase in grades came some increases in self-confidence, and all of the factors outlined gradually began to instill in the FOCUS students a sense that they were capable of doing classroom work and a sense of accomplishment that was self-sustaining.

The community and parents of students have also begun to understand the value of the FOCUS program and have begun inquiry into the program. Two parents of rising seventh graders called the school to see if they could get their child into "that new program." Report card night is a special night when the FOCUS students and their parents are invited to school to receive their report cards and a face-to-face progress report from their teachers. These special evenings are



usually the first positive contact with a public school the parents have had since their child has been enrolled in school. The meetings continue well past the two-hour set meeting time and the principal must often call a halt to the meeting as the parents seem to be hanging onto every positive word said about their children. The look at the pride in the faces of the parents, however, makes it extremely difficult to call the meeting to a close. As one parent said at the end of the first meeting, "I really dreaded coming to school tonight but I sure do look forward to the next FOCUS Family Night . . . If there's anything I can do to help the school, please call me."

As further evidence of the positive impact of the FOCUS program on parents, the number of telephone calls of concern that were received from the parents of students enrolled in the FOCUS program increased dramatically when word reached them that, due to cuts in the requested school budget by the county commissioners, there was a possibility that the program would be cut out. Many of the parents volunteered to attend any special budget meetings that would be held in an attempt to let the commissioners know the positive aspects of the program and to save the program.

In addition, it was known by the FOCUS staff that one parent who worked in another town and whose company requested that she move to that town continued to send her daughter to school at East Junior High School because the mother was so pleased with her daughter's progress in the program. Only when she understood that budget cuts endangered the FOCUS program did she put a deposit on a house in the other town.

When the budget was finalized and FOCUS survived, the mother was most upset that the deposit could not be refunded and that her daughter would have to attend a large high school in the new town.

Chapter IV has looked at the quantitative and qualitative data gathered during the 1985-1986 and 1986-1987 academic years to assess the FOCUS program. Analyses of the data were conducted to test the first six hypotheses of the study and to provide a profile of the FOCUS student and the impact of the program on staff, parents, and the community. Chapter V will present a summary of the study, conclusions, and include recommendations for further expansion of the FOCUS program as well as recommendations for further studies that could be conducted.

CHAPTER V  
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS,  
AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Following the year-long study of the FOCUS program, data were gathered from the FOCUS students, staff, parents, and a student comparison group. Pre- and posttreatment data were gathered from the following sources: the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale; grades earned in all academic courses; in-school suspension assignments; out-of-school suspension assignments; attendance; and the results of the California Achievement Test. Once equivalence between the two groups was established, based on pretreatment data from the previous year, the data were analyzed for statistically significant differences between the FOCUS group and the comparison group at the end of the 1986-1987 academic year. The differences between group means were used to assess significant positive change in these areas. In addition to the statistical data gathered, profiles of FOCUS students were assembled in an attempt to provide a glimpse into the world of the potential dropout. The purpose of this chapter is to draw conclusions from the results of this study and to make recommendations for further study.

### Conclusions

- H<sub>1</sub>: There is a statistically significant increase in the self-concept scores of FOCUS students when compared to students of similar background not participating in the FOCUS program as measured by use of the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale.

Potential dropouts typically have a very low self-image, that when coupled with academic failure, generally lead to these students leaving school before graduation. One of the cornerstones of the FOCUS program, and the first hypothesis to be tested or question to be answered in this study, was the improvement of a student's self-concept. The change in a student's perception of himself was measured by the administration of pre- and posttests of a widely used and validated test of self-concept. As the results of the pretest have shown in Table 1, there was no significant difference between the FOCUS class and the comparison group when the two groups were compared to each other. In other words, the two groups started the 1986-1987 academic year extremely close to each other in terms of their perception of themselves.

When the 1986-1987 academic year began to draw to a close, the posttest of the same self-concept scale was again given to both groups to determine if a difference had occurred between the two groups. The results of the posttest shown in Table 2 indicate that the two groups were, once again, extremely close to each other on the scores of the self-concept measure. Therefore, there was no significant difference between the two groups at the end of the treatment period, i.e., the FOCUS group and the comparison group were very close to each other in terms of perceptions of self.

Probably the process of looking at and improving students' self-concept should be an on-going process. In all likelihood, the self-concept of students will gradually increase in small increments over a period of years rather than a period of months. A possible explanation for the slight decline in the FOCUS group's self-concept scores is that, as a result of the FOCUS program, the students enrolled in the program began to take a more realistic approach to their situations and the possible solutions to their problems. In other words, they began to realistically look at their home and school difficulties rather than retreating to their "own worlds" to escape their problems and the mixture of pluses and minuses indicated their own internal struggles in dealing with seemingly impossible situations.

#### Academic achievement.

H<sub>2</sub>: There is a statistically significant increase in the academic achievement profile of FOCUS students when compared to students of similar background not participating in the FOCUS program.

The results of the language arts grades for the 1985-1986 school year indicate that the FOCUS students were significantly behind the comparison group in the grades they earned. Ordinarily, an analysis of covariance would be performed to adjust for these preexisting differences.

However, when the language arts data obtained from the 1986-1987 academic year is compared for both groups, the difference shows the FOCUS students significantly ahead of the comparison group. An analysis of covariance was, therefore, not needed to understand the results. The comparison group increased their language arts failures and

decreased their overall course averages (mean) from 75.80 to 73.55 as compared to the FOCUS group which decreased their language arts failures to two and increased the overall course averages (mean) from 70.60 to 82.92. The FOCUS group, therefore, did significantly increase their language arts grades by the end of the study period.

In the academic area of math, comparison of the two groups' scores for the 1985-1986 academic year again indicated a significant initial difference existed between the two groups. However, as in the case of the language arts grades, the FOCUS students began significantly behind the comparison group in math grades. All of the FOCUS students failed their math class during the 1985-1986 school year with an academic average (mean) of 69.00 while there were only seven failures in the comparison group with an academic average of 75.15.

At the end of the 1986-1987 academic year, although the FOCUS group did not show a significant increase in math grades compared with the comparison group, the FOCUS group mean was now higher than the comparison group's. The hypothesis, therefore, is not supported in the academic subject of math. One must look further and note the changes that occurred in the FOCUS group as contrasted with the comparison group. There were a total of four failures in the FOCUS group in math and the academic average of the FOCUS class increased from 69.00 to 78.08. By comparison, the academic failures of the comparison group decreased by 1 to 6 failures for the 1986-1987 school year; however, the academic average of the comparison group decreased from 76.13 to 74.36 for the academic year. It must be remembered and taken into account

that no positive significant difference for the 1986-1987 academic year as compared to a significant negative difference for the 1985-1986 school year means the FOCUS students came from a far greater deficit of averages and actually accomplished more than the test of significance allows.

Calculations for the academic subject of science for the 1985-1986 school year indicate that the FOCUS group had an overall course average of 69.93 and 12 failures while the comparison group had 9 failures and an overall course average of 71.80. The calculation of the t test value and reference to the t table indicated that there was no significant difference between the two groups at the beginning of the 1986-1987 school year. At the conclusion of the 1986-1987 school year, the FOCUS students had increased their academic average by 18 points to 88.00 with no course failures while the comparison group had decreased their academic average to 69.82 and decreased the number of failures by 1 to 8 failures for the year. Calculation of the t test value indicated a significant positive difference existed at the end of the FOCUS treatment.

In the area of social studies, 12 of the FOCUS students failed the course for the 1985-1986 school year and the overall class average for the subject was 70.20. In comparison, the comparison group collected a total of six course failures and maintained an overall class average of 73.87. Calculations of the t test value indicated that there was not a significant difference between the two groups at the beginning of the study. At the end of the 1986-1987 school year, a

statistically significant positive difference existed between the FOCUS class and the comparison group with the FOCUS students decreasing their failures to one and increasing their overall class average by 10 points to 80.85. The comparison group's average of 73.82 remained close to the 1985-1986 average and decreased the total number of failures to three.

Fourteen of the FOCUS students failed health/physical education for the 1985-1986 academic year with a class average of 69.87. The members of the comparison group experienced seven course failures and maintained an overall average of 73.07 for the same time period. There was no significant difference, therefore, between the two groups as the study began. The conclusion of the 1986-1987 academic year, however, found a significant positive difference existed between the two groups. The FOCUS students decreased their total failures to one and increased the class average to 76.69 while the comparison group increased the number of course failures to eight and decreased the class average by four points to 69.64.

The general hypothesis stated that the academic achievement profile of the FOCUS students would increase as a result of the intensive treatment given to the FOCUS group and not given to the comparison group. Of the five major academic subjects, significant differences were found to exist between the two groups of students at the conclusion of the 1986-1987 academic year in four of the five academic subjects taken by all students: (1) language arts, (2) science, (3) social studies, and (4) health/physical education. The FOCUS treatment was



able to increase the students' overall academic averages and decrease the number of course failures in these areas. In addition to the significant differences that occurred in these academic courses, the FOCUS students began the study behind the comparison group in math and at the end of the study, the FOCUS group out performed the comparison group in math as evidenced by the 1986-1987 data. Therefore, it may be stated that the general hypothesis is supported.

In-school suspension assignments.

H<sub>3</sub>: There is a statistically significant decrease in the number of assignments to the in-school suspension center when compared to students of similar background not participating in the FOCUS program.

Another major hypothesis tested was that the FOCUS students would experience a significantly lower number of days assigned to the in-school suspension center than would the comparison group. The data gathered from the 1985-1986 school year indicated that no significant differences existed between the number of days spent in the in-school suspension center by either the FOCUS students or the members of the comparison group. The average number of days spent in in-school suspension by the FOCUS students was 2.87 and the number of days spent in the in-school suspension by the comparison group members was 3.33. The calculated  $t$  test value of .26 was not considered to be significant.

The data gathered from the 1986-87 school year also did not indicate a significant difference existed between the two groups and, therefore, it must be stated that the hypothesis was not supported. The average number of days spent assigned to the in-school suspension

center by members of the FOCUS class was 2.31 and the average number of days assigned to the in-school suspension center by members of the comparison group was 4.45. The calculated  $t$  test value of 1.26 was not sufficient to establish a significant difference in the number of days assigned to in-school suspension.

Although the hypothesis was not supported and there was not a significant difference between the total number of assigned days to the in-school suspension center, it must be stated that the average time spent in the center by members of the FOCUS class during the 1986-1987 school year decreased from the previous year by .56 days from 2.87 days to 2.31 days. On the other hand, the time spent in the center by the members of the comparison group during the 1986-1987 school year increased by 1.12 days from an average of 3.33 days to 4.45 days.

#### Out-of-school suspension assignments.

H<sub>4</sub>: There is a statistically significant decrease in the number of out-of-school suspension assignments when compared to students of similar background not participating in the FOCUS program.

An additional major problem addressed by the study was the reduction of the number of days of out-of-school suspensions experienced by the FOCUS students when compared to the comparison group. The average number of days spent on out-of-school suspensions by the members of the FOCUS group was 7.60 and the standard deviation for the group was 15.80 which indicated that there was a wide spread within the FOCUS group in terms of days spent on out-of-school suspensions. On the other hand, the average number of days spent on out-of-school

suspensions by the members of the comparison group was .93 days with a standard deviation of 2.22 which indicated that the number of days assigned to out-of-school suspension of this group were very close together.

Data from the 1986-1987 school year again revealed no significant difference between the two groups, and it must be stated that the hypothesis was not supported. Two major factors, however, must be studied in more detail are: (1) the type of offense causing the out-of-school suspension and (2) the decrease in the overall number of days suspended out of school by members of the FOCUS class during the 1986-1987 school year.

Although the five seventh graders enrolled in the FOCUS program served 25 days of the total of 44 days in out-of-school suspensions, the data gathered does not support differences between the seventh-grade students and the eighth- and ninth-grade students in the FOCUS class. The major reason for FOCUS students receiving out-of-school suspensions was fighting with another member of the FOCUS class; never was a student in the FOCUS class suspended for fighting with another member of the "regular" student body. On the other hand, the major reasons for students in the comparison group receiving out-of-school suspensions were (1) alcohol on campus; (2) smoking; (3) general disruption of class(es); and (4) failure to cooperate with teachers and administrators.

When one looks at the reduction of the number of days spent on out-of-school suspensions by members of the FOCUS class from 114 days during the 1985-86 school year to 44 days during the 1986-87 academic year, the reduction of 70 days in out-of-school suspensions becomes more noteworthy. Even more interesting is the increase by 33 days in out-of-school suspensions experienced by members of the comparison group from 14 days during the 1985-86 school year to 47 days during the 1986-87 school year. The average number of days spent on out-of-school suspensions of the FOCUS group decreased from 7.60 to 3.38 while the mean of the comparison group increased from .93 days to 4.27 days during the 1986-87 school year. The closing of the tremendous gap that existed between the two groups represented a major step forward by these students.

#### Attendance.

H<sub>5</sub>: There is a statistically significant increase in the attendance of students involved in the FOCUS program when compared to students of similar background not participating in the FOCUS program.

Attendance is another major problem experienced by the potential dropout and another objective of the FOCUS program is to reduce the number of days of school missed by the students. During the 1985-86 school year, the members of the FOCUS class missed a total of 286 days out of school or an average of 19.07 days due to absences almost all of which were unexcused absences. The total number of days missed by members of the comparison group were 196 days or an average of 13.07 days. When the t test value was calculated, there was found to be no significant difference between the two groups of students for the 1985-86 school year.

During the 1986-87 school year, the FOCUS students missed a total of 111 days due to absences with 44 of these days accounted for in out-of-school suspensions and the remainder accounted for as excused absences with no truancies. The FOCUS students reduced the average number of days absent of 11 days to 8.54 days absent while the members of the comparison group increased the average number of days absent to 16.64. With a calculated t test value of 2.15, a significant difference existed between the members of the FOCUS class and the members of the comparison group. Therefore, the hypothesis, or questions, was supported by the data gathered.

#### California Achievement Test scores.

H<sub>6</sub>: There is a statistically significant increase in the scores of the students involved in the FOCUS program on the California Achievement Test when compared to students of similar background not participating in the FOCUS program.

Another of the major hypothesis or questions to be studied focused on the California Achievement Test scores received by members of the FOCUS and comparison groups. It was hoped that a significant difference would exist between the two groups at the end of the 1986-1987 school year and that the FOCUS treatment would be the major cause of that difference. The average scale score received by members of the FOCUS group on the 1986 version of the CAT was 674.71 while the comparison group received an average of 700.92 and not differences were found between the FOCUS and comparison groups on the 1986 version of the test.

The 1987 version of the California Achievement Test produced similar results with the average scale score of the FOCUS group being 703.85 while the average raw score of the members of the comparison group was 708.09. The standard deviations of both groups were considerably different with the comparison group's standard deviation 42.25 compared to the FOCUS group's 29.37. The calculated t test value of .29 was not enough to establish a significant difference between the two groups and the hypothesis is not supported.

As in the case of self-concept, there must be an examination of the data and the implications present in that data although significance is not indicated in the area of the California Achievement Test. Scores on the California Achievement Test are far less likely to experience dramatic increases in just a one-year period of time due to the cumulative nature of the information contained on such tests. It follows that a longer period of time would be needed in order to experience significant gains in this area.

Parent and student perceptions of FOCUS program.

H<sub>7</sub>: There is a positive increase in the perception of the FOCUS program on the part of the students participating in the program, the parents of these students, and the faculty of the school.

Through the interviews conducted with students in the FOCUS program, parents of those students, and the faculty of East Junior High School, it has become obvious that the benefits of the FOCUS program are numerous. Teachers now understand the purpose of the program and continue referring new students to the program even when there is no more room in the FOCUS class for new students. Teachers are further

relieved of the burden of dealing with these potentially disruptive students and feel that these students are being served in a much better atmosphere than could be offered by the regular classroom teacher who must deal with a large number of students on a daily basis.

Students refer themselves to the FOCUS program because they recognize their own limits and the limits of the regular classroom teacher. In addition, the potential dropout wishes to experience some of the positive aspects of the school setting instead of continually experiencing the negative aspects of the school. Parents' offers of help when needed and statements of support given to the FOCUS aide indicate a great appreciation of what the program has been able to accomplish for the sons and daughters of these parents.

In addition to the significant differences found to exist in the areas of attendance and the majority of the academic courses, the value of the program to students, administration, teachers, and parents cannot be disputed or underestimated. When one realizes and understands that these potential dropouts did not find themselves in this predicament overnight, it becomes obvious that overnight success in cumulative areas such as California Achievement Test scores and self-concept is simply not possible. Instead, a slow recovery in these areas would be indicated and the key to this recovery is keeping the students in school where the positive experiences so necessary and needed may be accomplished.

### Implications

A number of tendencies and issues emerged as the data for the study were collected and analyzed. In some cases, the results did not lead to definitive conclusions. However, these tendencies are judged to be important as a basis for further reflection and possibly additional research. The first implication from the study is that incoming, or rising, seventh graders may not benefit from inclusion in this type of program. The data already pointed out in relation to the seventh graders in the early part of the school year indicate that these students have not been given the experience of failing in the regular programs component of the school's curriculum. As a result of social promotion, both within the elementary schools and to the seventh grade by the feeder elementary schools, these seventh graders have the conception (and will tell you) that they will be promoted to another grade at the end of the school year. Only when these students are retained, do they begin to understand what the FOCUS program can offer them and, finally, do they appreciate and begin to take advantage of the opportunities available in FOCUS. The second implication follows naturally, therefore, to admit only repeating seventh graders to the program.

A third implication from the study to the structural component of the FOCUS program is that certain types of faculty need to be selected and retained as FOCUS faculty. The selected faculty members must evidence a great deal of patience and understanding in working with this special group of students throughout the school year. The



identification and retention of such faculty and their continuing involvement and input in the FOCUS program is necessary to provide continuity and comfort for all during the following academic terms. By providing no faculty changes in the coming school terms, students and faculty will not have to experience the initial "breaking in" period evident at the beginning of any new academic year. In addition, the program will be able to begin each new academic year where the previous academic year stopped.

A fourth implication is that the program should be expanded to include ninth grade courses for those students who satisfactorily complete the eighth grade year. Included in these course offerings should be the same vocational components, i.e., agriculture, home economics, or business, as if offered to students in the regular programs. Scheduling for this component could present a problem; however, ninth grade students could be scheduled into the vocational classes during the second period of the language arts block necessary in seventh and eighth grade language arts. Ninth grade FOCUS students, therefore, would have language arts one period of the school day as is the custom of all ninth graders in the school. The end result is to make the FOCUS students as much a part of the main flow of the school as is possible and still maintain the contact necessary with the FOCUS aide.

A fifth implication is to expand the FOCUS program to the high school level in order to afford the students who are in a transition year the opportunity to make the critical adjustments necessary to the high school level. Guidance counselors on the high school level state

that many potential students drop out during the first two months of school because they cannot seem to cope with the high school surroundings or atmosphere. Many students in Alexander County that make it through the initial months still continue to drop out during the course of the sophomore year stating reasons such as "nobody cared if I came to school or not" or "it was OK but it sure was not as warm and caring as East Junior High." Since the transition year is such a critical year in terms of keeping students in school, both in Alexander County and across the nation, the recommendation of expanding FOCUS to the high school level is a natural one. It is important, however, that there be two programs in operation at the same time--one on the junior high or middle school level and one on the high school level. It should be noted that the FOCUS program was originally developed for use on the high school level; therefore, its success on this level has already been documented by many studies.

The low cost of the program, i.e., the only additional employee needed to operate the program is the FOCUS aide, makes it an extremely easy program to begin at the high school level. The addition of the FOCUS program at the high school level would provide these marginal students the atmosphere of caring and the warm environment that is so vital to keeping them in school during the initial months of the sophomore year. Once students have completed the sophomore year, they may begin to co-op, begin work/study programs, and/or pick up vocational courses of interest to them in their junior and senior years. The end

result will be to keep these students in school; allow these students to earn their high school diplomas; and, in many cases, earn money and get a job that they may continue after graduation.

Within the FOCUS curriculum, a sixth implication is to continue the students' exposure to computers and to incorporate them into every facet of instruction in the FOCUS class. Computers were used in two of the FOCUS classes during the 1986-1987 school year with many students showing their first visible excitement during the use of the computers. This recommendation is another natural one and simply builds upon the initial excitement of attempting and mastering something new.

#### Recommendations

In addition to the statistically significant results obtained from the year-long study, many other noteworthy changes occurred in the FOCUS students and their parents during the course of the 1986-1987 school year. Many of the changes that did occur cannot be measured by numbers; instead, one must rely on vague words, such as "atmosphere," "appearance," and "maturity," in an attempt to describe what occurred in the FOCUS classroom in the course of the school year. The purpose of this section is to make a recommendation for the continuation of the program and outline specific areas of further study that may be found to exist as a result of this study.

The first recommendation to arise from the study is for FOCUS personnel to continue to concentrate on the improvement of the self-concept of the students involved in the program. As has been stated,

the low self-concept shown by many of these students is not a recent happening; instead, it began many years ago. It should be understood by those involved in the program that positive changes in one's self-concept occurs at a slower rate than do changes in grades or attendance. Continued involvement of the guidance counselor assigned to the FOCUS classroom is also necessary in the planning of families that deal with increasing self-concept.

A second recommendation occurs in the area of increasing the test scores on the California Achievement Test. Continued monitoring of the scores on the CAT will help the FOCUS personnel develop annual plans designed to deal with the areas of deficiencies shown by students on this test. In order to provide a comfortable atmosphere, the FOCUS students should be kept together with the aide during the testing periods in order to prevent apprehension on the part of the students. In addition, special instruction should be given FOCUS students prior to the test week relative to the mechanics of taking the test, i.e., penalties for guessing and time limits. Included in this recommendation would be a concentrated administration of practice timed tests prior to the administration of the California Achievement Tests. Many of the results obtained from past test years indicated to the administration that students simply did not know how to take the test.

A major recommendation for further study would be to investigate the role of the principal in the success of the programs like FOCUS. At East Junior High School, the location of the FOCUS classroom next to the principal's office; the constant involvement of the principal in

the day-to-day operation of the FOCUS classroom; and the constant support of the principal given to members of the FOCUS staff and students, it is obvious that the role of the principal is a critical and key factor to the success of any innovative program. The recommendation, therefore, is made that a study be completed relative to this "classic" assumption of educational administration.

Another recommendation for further study is that this type of study be replicated in other school settings in an effort to determine whether all or some of these findings are generalizable. Such replications would help support the hypotheses tested and would also lead to a greater understanding of the potential dropout. The increase in the numbers of students studied would also provide a data base for program modifications.

An additional recommendation that evolves from this study is to further investigate the role of the FOCUS aide as a major contributor to the success of the FOCUS program. The role of the aide is an extremely complex role and one that requires the aide to "wear many hats" during the school day ranging from disciplinarian to substitute mother. It is obvious that finding such a person to fill this role is an extremely difficult task for the building principal; however, finding the "ideal" person for this program is an important building block for the success of the program. In addition to increasing the number of students studied in order to provide a data base, it is recommended that a longitudinal study of the students in the FOCUS program and the comparison group during the course of the collection of data be

completed. By following these students over the next several years, important data could be gathered that would help the FOCUS staff as well as contribute to the general body of knowledge involving at-risk students.

### Concluding Statement

Johnston et al. (1985) describe the potential dropout as follows:

The profile of the dropout that emerges . . . is similar to the image most of us carry around with us from our own days in school. You remember them. It was the girl who became pregnant and couldn't keep to school schedules; it was the guy who hung around the fringes of school life, had a job after school and seldom participated in anything; it was the kid slumped in the back of the classroom with a glazed expression who only snapped to life when the bell rang and he was given four minutes of free time. The most disturbing thing is that when they dropped out, it took a long time for most of us to notice that they were gone.

The school dropout has become a problem of national concern especially when one studies the statistics published on the increasing numbers of students who fail to complete high school annually. An additional concern that is frequently not addressed is the student who has not yet reached his 16th birthday but yet has made plans to quit school when that birthday is reached. These junior high school or middle school students create discipline problems that are usually handled by out-of-school suspensions rather than attempting to work with the students to help them understand the serious life-long consequences of leaving school without a diploma. In addition, these school dropouts become a burden that must be supported by society rather than contributing members to society.

The dropout literature only serves to reinforce the fact that educators across the country cannot even agree on a definition of what a dropout is, let alone develop plans to combat the problem. The literature also points to a potential problem of increased scholastic requirements leading to an increase in the number of dropouts that educators must begin to deal with. Although programs exist in almost every school system designed to deal with the dropout problem, approaches to the problem are not consistent. The only consistency is agreement among professionals that early intervention is the key to stemming the rising tide of school dropouts; however, few in-depth programs exist on the junior high school level where they can make an important difference to the potential dropout.

The purpose of this study has been to document a junior high school program that was designed to deal with the dropout problem early in the students' educational years. The program, FOCUS, has experienced documented successes in preventing students from dropping out of school and creating the caring, nurturing environment that students like those described by Johnston et al. (1985) so desperately need in order to turn their school failures into successes. The study extended over an entire academic year and followed the FOCUS students using a comparison group to assess their successes in the program. In addition, successes not as easily captured by quantitative measures were experienced by these students involved in the FOCUS program.

Johnston et al. (1985) best summarize the intent of FOCUS and the staff members involved in the program when they stated:

The job of the middle level educator is clear. We must notice them well before they are gone, and we must move to increase their success with school, improve the recognition they receive in school, involve them in the life of the school. It may be that special programs aren't necessary . . . only flexible adults who are more concerned about kids and how they learn than about rules and how kids obey them.



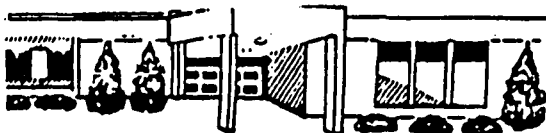
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APPENDIX A  
CONSENT LETTER



**EAST JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL**  
Route 2, Box 358C  
Hiddenite, N.C. 28636

**PRINCIPAL**  
Hampton D. Casebolt

Dear Parent:

Your child, \_\_\_\_\_, has been selected to take part in an evaluation of a special educational component which has been in existence at our school for two years. The data to be used in the evaluation would consist of academic and behavioral records of your child. The evaluation is being undertaken as part of an effort to keep the program operating at East Junior High.

If you have any questions concerning this matter, please call either Debbie Leonhardt or Joy Bentley at 632-7670.

Please be assured that no names will be used in the evaluation so complete confidentiality will be maintained for your child.

A stamped self-addressed envelope is enclosed for your convenience in returning the permission form. Thank you.

Sincerely,

*Debbie Leonhardt*

Debbie Leonhardt  
Guidance Department

Date \_\_\_\_\_

I give - do not give (please circle one) my permission for my child, \_\_\_\_\_, to take part in the evaluation project being conducted at East Junior High School.

APPENDIX B

RAW DATA

Pre- and Posttests of Piers-Harris Focus and  
Comparison Groups in Percentiles

Focus Group				Comparison Group			
Student Number		Total Score	Loss or Gain	Student Number		Total Score	Loss or Gain
001	PRE	85		101	PRE	77	
	POST	66	-19		POST	77	0
002	PRE	6		102	PRE	77	
	POST	17	+11		POST	31	-46
003	PRE	89		103	PRE	36	
	POST	95	+ 6		POST	31	- 5
004	PRE	74					
	POST	71	- 3				
005	PRE	14		105	PRE	44	
	POST	3	-11		POST	44	0
006	PRE	46		106	PRE	38	
	POST	24	-22		POST	55	-17
007	PRE	7		107	PRE	21	
	POST	14	+ 7		POST	12	- 9
009	PRE	69		109	PRE	18	
	POST	66	- 3		POST	25	+ 7
010	PRE	38					
	POST	49	+11				
				111	PRE	2	
					POST	2	0
012	PRE	11					
	POST	1	-10				
013	PRE	97		113	PRE	93	
	POST	95	- 2		POST	96	+ 3
014	PRE	36		114	PRE	94	
	POST	49	+13		POST	98	+ 4
015	PRE	36		115	PRE	52	
	POST	33	- 3		POST	74	+22

## English Course Grades in Final Numerical Average

## Focus and Comparison Groups

Student Number	Focus 1985-86	Focus 1986-87	Student Number	Comparison 1985-86	Comparison 1986-87
001	69	91	101	70	73
002	78	84	102	69	69
003	69	92	103	86	69
004	69	86	104	69	Student moved family problems
005	69	87	105	69	69
006	69	89	106	69	70
007	69	Student removed from program	107	69	69
008	69	69	108	93	Student quit school
009	69	84	109	70	89
010	69	80	110	81	Student quit school
011	69	Student removed from program	111	85	69
012	76	95	112	77	Student moved family problems
013	69	90	113	81	85
014	77	69	114	78	78
015	69	70	115	71	69



Mathematics Course Grades in Final Numerical  
Average Focus and Comparison Groups

Student Number	Focus 1985-86	Focus 1986-87	Student Number	Comparison 1985-86	Comparison 1986-87
001	69	79	101	77	69
002	69	81	102	69	69
003	69	85	103	91	74
004	69	75	104	69	Student moved family problems
005	69	77	105	69	69
006	69	83	106	82	69
007	69	Student removed from program	107	69	69
008	69	69	108	82	Student quit school
009	69	86	109	69	87
010	69	69	110	78	School quit school
011	69	Student removed from program	111	92	80
012	69	91	112	69	Student moved family problems
013	69	82	113	87	80
014	69	69	114	70	83
015	69	69	115	69	69

## Science Course Grades in Final Numerical

## Average Focus and Comparison Groups

Student Number	Focus 1985-86	Focus 1986-87	Student Number	Comparison 1985-86	Comparison 1986-87
001	72	95	101	71	69
002	69	95	102	69	69
003	69	95	103	76	69
004	76	93	104	69	Student moved family problems
005	69	94	105	69	69
006	73	83	106	69	70
007	69	Student removed from program	107	69	69
008	69	73	108	84	Student quit school
009	69	87	109	82	73
010	69	80	110	70	Student quit school
011	69	Student removed from program	111	77	69
012	69	94	112	69	Student moved family problems
013	69	94	113	69	69
014	69	79	114	69	73
015	69	82	115	69	69

## Social Studies Grades in Final Numerical

## Average Focus and Comparison Groups

Student Number	Focus 1985-86	Focus 1986-87	Student Number	Comparison 1985-86	Comparison 1986-87
001	69	83	101	73	69
002	69	77	102	69	75
003	78	93	103	87	72
004	70	85	104	69	Student moved family problems
005	69	81	105	81	78
006	69	90	106	69	69
007	69	Student removed from program	107	69	69
008	69	69	108	71	Student quit school
009	69	77	109	70	77
010	69	81	110	77	Student quit school
011	69	Student removed from program	111	69	70
012	77	89	112	77	Student moved family problems
013	69	86	113	81	86
014	69	70	114	85	77
015	69	70	115	69	70

Health and Physical Education Grades in Final  
Numerical Average Focus and Comparison Groups

Student Number	Focus 1985-86	Focus 1986-87	Student Number	Comparison 1985-86	Comparison 1986-87
001	69	73	101	69	69
002	69	80	102	69	70
003	79	87	103	70	69
004	69	77	104	69	Student moved family problems
005	69	75	105	74	69
006	69	83	106	97	69
007	69	Student removed from program	107	69	69
008	69	69	108	69	Student quit school
009	69	70	109	69	69
010	69	71	110	72	Student quit school
011	69	Student removed from program	111	69	69
012	69	82	112	77	Student moved family problems
013	69	82	113	83	70
014	69	76	114	70	74
015	69	72	115	70	69

## In-School Suspension Assignments in Days Served

## Focus and Comparison Groups

Student Number	Focus 1985-86	Focus 1986-87	Student Number	Comparison 1985-86	Comparison 1986-87
001	7	4	101	4	3
002	6	0	102	0	3
003	6	0	103	0	6
004	0	0	104	0	Student moved family problems
005	0	3	105	3	6
006	0	3	106	0	3
007	0	Student removed from program	107	0	13
008	0	6	108	3	Student quit school
009	3	5	109	10	3
010	8	0	110	22	Student quit school
011	5	Student removed from program	111	0	6
012	0	0	112	0	Student moved family problems
013	8	0	113	0	3
014	0	6	114	8	3
015	0	3	115	0	0

## Out-of-School Suspensions in Days Absent

## Focus and Comparison Groups

Student Number	Focus 1985-86	Focus 1986-87	Student Number	Comparison 1985-86	Comparison 1986-87
001	0	10	101	0	10
002	0	0	102	0	3
003	0	0	103	0	0
004	9	0	104	3	Student moved family problems
005	0	8	105	8	18
006	3	0	106	0	0
007	0	Student removed from program	107	0	13
008	10	3	108	0	Student quit school
009	48	6	109	0	0
010	10	3	110	0	Student quit school
011	43	Student removed from program	111	0	0
012	0	0	112	0	Student moved family problems
013	0	0	113	0	0
014	0	6	114	0	0
015	0	8	115	3	3

## Student Attendance in Days Absent

## Focus and Comparison Groups

Student Number	Focus 1985-86	Focus 1986-87	Student Number	Comparison 1985-86	Comparison 1986-87
001	13	20	101	6	13
002	7	1	102	8	7
003	4	3	103	6	20
004	5	1	104	26	Student moved family problems
005	9	10	105	20	35
006	8	5	106	4	36
007	2	Student removed from program	107	16	29
008	29	10	108	3	Student quit school
009	75	18	109	19	8
010	13	7	110	22	Student quit school
011	60	Student removed from program	111	19	14
012	21	7	112	25	Student moved family problems
013	14	8	113	1	1
014	11	7	114	4	5
015	15	14	115	17	15

## California Achievement Test Scores in Scale Scores

## Focus and Comparison Groups

Student Number	Focus 1985-86	Focus 1986-87	Student Number	Comparison 1985-86	Comparison 1986-87
001	Scores not available	729	101	727	723
002	676	700	102	651	680
003	723	741	103	754	752
004	688	715	104	658	Student moved family problems
005	689	698	105	704	705
006	674	717	106	679	675
007	667	Student removed from program	107	612	622
008	634	647	108	753	Student quit school
009	660	699	109	745	758
010	658	688	110	Scores not available	Student quit school
011	668	Student removed from program	111	666	687
012	737	751	112	Scores not available	Student moved family problems
013	700	719	113	758	765
014	655	681	114	697	721
015	617	665	115	708	701